

The Psalms and Workplace Bullying: A Counseling Program for Pastors and Victims

by

Johanna McCune Wagner

Divinity School
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

Dr. Craig Dykstra, Supervisor

Dr. Warren Kinghorn

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School in the Graduate School
of Duke University

2014

ABSTRACT

The Psalms and Workplace Bullying: A Counseling Program for Pastors and Victims

by

Johanna McCune Wagner

Divinity School
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

Dr. Craig Dykstra, Supervisor

Dr. Warren Kinghorn

An abstract of a thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Ministry in the Divinity School
in the Graduate School of
Duke University

2014

Copyright by
Johanna McCune Wagner
2014

Abstract

Given the prevalence and cost of workplace bullying, and the degree to which the systemic issues that support it are not soon to change for the American worker, this thesis will educate pastors on how, through the study of select psalms, they might go about counseling victims of this devastating form of interpersonal sin. The thesis will employ the research of experts in organizational behavior to define and describe the phenomenon of workplace bullying; mine the scriptural and commentary traditions for insight into the dynamics of interpersonal hostility; and provide journaling and visualization exercises for pastors to use in the counseling relationship. The thesis will conclude with suggestions as to how pastors might leverage congregational resources to support victims of workplace bullying and working congregants.

Dedication

For my mother, Shannon McCune Wagner

Contents

Abstract.....	iv
List of Tables	x
1. Introduction	1
1.1 What is workplace bullying?	7
1.2 Living with the psalms	13
1.3 Recognize, then respond.....	16
1.4 Journaling and visualization	18
1.5 Time heals wounds, not impatient pastors	22
1.6 Other possible applications	23
1.7. Concluding cautionary remarks	23
2. The hidden bully	26
2.1 Background on Psalm 10	26
2.2 The struggle to understand	28
2.3 Looking like God	29
2.4 When bullies grow up	31
2.5 A vocabulary lesson and shift in perspective	32
2.6 Review concepts.....	34
2.7 Sample journaling and visualization exercise for Psalm 10	34
2.7.1 Exercise: first day at work	35
2.8 Conclusion	37

3. The bullying pack.....	38
3.1 Background on Psalm 22	38
3.2 The pack instinct	41
3.3 The victim as worm	42
3.4 Seeing through hyperbole	43
3.5 Review concepts.....	46
3.6 Sample journaling and visualization exercises for Psalm 22.....	46
3.6.1 Exercise: zoology	48
3.6.2 Exercise: body scan.....	49
3.7 Conclusion	50
4. The antisocial bully	51
4.1 The bully as “abandoned despiser of God”	51
4.2 Rage, malice and savagery	53
4.3 God versus the bully	54
4.4 They have ceased to act wisely and do good.....	56
4.5 It becomes us to elevate our thoughts	58
4.6 Review concepts.....	60
4.7 Sample journaling and visualization exercises for Psalm 36.....	60
4.7.1 Exercise: virtual meeting	61
4.7.2 Exercise: the rules of the game.....	62
4.7.3 Exercise: opposite behaviors	63
4.8 Conclusion	64

5. The angry victim.....	65
5.1 The sufferings of the just	65
5.2 A different strategy.....	67
5.3 Now, but also then.....	71
5.4 The bully as smoke	73
5.5 A still more excellent way	75
5.6 Review concepts.....	78
5.7 Sample journaling and visualization exercises for Psalm 37.....	78
5.7.1 Exercise: <i>memento mori</i> , take one	78
5.7.2 Exercise: <i>memento mori</i> , take two	80
5.7.3 Exercise: <i>memento mori</i> , take three	81
5.7 Conclusion	82
6. The dependent victim.....	83
6.1 Psalm 91's reception history.....	83
6.2 The geography of workplace bullying	86
6.3 A God who answers	89
6.4 The victim who depends	93
6.5 Review concepts.....	94
6.6 Sample journaling and visualization exercises for Psalm 91.....	95
6.6.1 Exercise: safety nets	96
6.6.2 Exercise: opposite God.....	97
6.6.3 Exercise: boundary work	98

6.7 Conclusion	99
7. The pastor as counselor	100
7.1 The contemporary workplace	106
Bibliography.....	110
Biography	114

List of Tables

Table 1.1 Examples of workplace abuse and aggression behaviors	7
--	---

1. Introduction

It came as a surprise when, as a young chaplain at my first school, I realized that bullying was not just something to be concerned about in the student body. It was part of the adult work world, too. At first, it was comments about this or that administrative assistant, and how I should do my best not to have to go to them for anything. Then it was lunchtime chatter about a certain department chair, and how impossible he made it for any of the department's new hires to stay longer than two or three years. Then it was a story about a derogatory nickname given to a new administrator, prior to her even having stepped foot on campus. Eventually I found myself counseling people on how best to handle bullying colleagues, and serving as a sympathetic ear when my advice and their best efforts still left them reeling after yet another hostile email or vindictive attempt to undermine them. At a certain point and after many conversations with friends and other pastors, I became convinced that the challenges my colleagues faced were not exceptional. There was more than enough bullying to go around at other independent schools, as well as churches, hospitals and companies, both small and large, to merit trying to figure out what could be done about it. This thesis is the result of my desire to learn more about workplace bullying and how to minister to its victims.

Over the years, my approach to this issue has incorporated lessons specific to my vocation as a school chaplain, with responsibilities in the classroom, on the playing field, in the dormitory and in the chapel. Working, as I do, in an environment that stresses the

importance of helping students apply what they are learning in their courses and on their teams to their lives, I have come to see the value of breaking learning down into a series of stages, starting with language. I discern what words students need to know in order to understand an experience or text better. I then give them opportunities to put these new words and concepts into play in conversation, discussion and writing. When they get good at this, I ask them to consider what life might be like if this concept were to become more to them than just a word they once had to learn in order to write an essay on the Book of Genesis. I do not hand out vocabulary lists anymore and simply point students towards dictionaries. Instead, I teach the process whereby words and concepts come to mean something to people. Likewise, when working with victims of workplace bullying, I want to do more than give them a few passages of scripture to read on their own. I want to teach them how to use these texts to read and change their lives.

For this reason, I have come to rely on counseling methods that go beyond the traditional emphasis on careful listening, incorporating practices like education, journaling and visualization. People often find themselves getting into trouble in their work relationships because they lack important information about human nature, the emotions or how the mind works. Perhaps they have been raised to believe that everyone is basically good or trying to do the right thing. When these people encounter coworkers who are not well-intentioned, they may not know what to make of their

behavior, and thus get into the habit of excusing what should not be excused or explained away. In counseling people in this situation, it is important to challenge their sense of what people are like. Otherwise, victims of workplace bullying will walk away from the counseling session with the same blind spots.

Likewise, people who have been raised “not to judge” may have difficulty attending to the warning signs that indicate that someone at work may have issues with hostility. They will lack what could be described as good observational skills, and thus not recognize when it might be appropriate to distance themselves from someone. In working with these people, a pastor needs to consider how best to remind them to notice such things as people’s body language when trying to discern people’s potential emotional issues.

Psychologists have access to manuals of exercises designed to help them teach clients how to regulate their moods or have difficult conversations. They also have access to educational materials they can give clients to teach clients about their diagnoses or providing basic information about such things as how to employ meditation to reduce stress. In what follows, I attempt to furnish pastors with similar resources to help them counsel victims of workplace bullying. In the course of the thesis, I will propose ways of mining the psalms for wisdom regarding hostility. I will provide journaling and visualization exercises designed to help victims apply these insights to their experiences at work. I will point out some of the challenges victims might

encounter journaling about their bullies. I will also familiarize pastors with some of the research being done by experts in organizational behavior on workplace bullying. In doing so, I hope to inspire pastors to take a more active role in ministries involving this issue.

Pastoral caregivers serve in a variety of different communities. Some, like myself, are attached to educational institutions, hospitals or the military. Others head up or work in specialized ministries within a staff. Still others serve as a congregation's solo pastor. Given our roles, workplace bullying as an issue in need of counseling interventions will crop up for us in different ways. Military chaplains will have victims show up at their offices, referred there by a commanding officer for help. Youth ministers may have to be attentive to signs that something is not right with a peer who recently changed jobs.

There are also differences in the amount of training or experience we pastors bring to our counseling ministries. Some pastors have degrees in social work in addition to their divinity degrees. They are comfortable working intensively with people one on one. Other pastors have had fewer opportunities to seek formal training in the counseling arts, and may feel that they need to be careful not to overstep in these situations. Still others may have spent years, prior to their becoming pastors, working in industries plagued by antisocial behavior, and may already have answered the call to mentor people struggling with bullying at work.

In what follows, I share what I have learned from experts in organizational behavior about the phenomenon, and what I take to be some of the signs and symptoms pastors might want to look for if they think they know someone being bullied at work. I then propose a novel counseling approach, marrying the practices of journaling and visualization with a program of scriptural study capable of empowering victims to be more discerning and creatively responsive in the situation in which they find themselves. I briefly state my reasons for making Psalms 10, 22, 36, 37 and 91 the linchpins of this pastoral care program. I also explain the pedagogical philosophy that informs my use as a pastoral caregiver of journaling and visualization exercises.

My intention throughout is to make this counseling approach as user friendly as possible, so as to inspire pastors from different backgrounds and with different degrees of counseling experience to engage in this ministry. To this end, Chapters Two through Six end with a list of points pastors might want to review during their scriptural study with victims of workplace bullying, as well as sample journaling and visualization exercises for them to give victims as homework between sessions. Furthermore, in Chapter Seven, the concluding chapter of the thesis, I will also suggest ways for pastors to get the word out to their congregations that they are ready and willing to counsel people dealing with hostility in the workplace.

It is a terrible thing to feel as if someone, a supervisor or colleague, has decided to ruin one's career, almost as if it were a game or an experiment to see how much

institutional power the bully possesses. The injustice of this can seem almost overwhelming. At the same time, victims often feel tremendous guilt and uncertainty. It is not always obvious what the bully is up to. His or her behavior can arrive with a smile. There can be protestations of innocence. Bullies may even claim to “really like” their victims. In the midst of the hostilities, victims of workplace bullying may begin to wonder about themselves and what kind of people they are. Here they are, so quick to blame this other person for the problems they are having as a teacher or novice attorney: Maybe it is not the other person at all. Maybe they are the ones with the problem. Maybe they are blaming this other person instead of facing the fact of their own incompetence. So goes the internal debate and self-recrimination.

My aim in this thesis is to equip pastors to counsel hurting people in need of better observational skills and a bolder theological vision regarding interpersonal hostility. Victims of workplace bullying are being harmed. They are being intimidated. They are being oppressed. It is, in biblical language, a “wicked” thing that is happening to them. If they know what to look for, and feel empowered to look for it, they will be able to see this for themselves. My aim is also to suggest certain counter-cultural, but effective scriptural ways of dealing with bullying. Knowing what to look for is half the battle. Knowing how to respond strategically, not out of rage or despair, is also an important step in healing the wounds of workplace bullying.

1.1 What is workplace bullying?

A victim of workplace bullying, a woman, once said to me, "This year is going much better. Last year at this time I was losing a lot of hair." Workplace bullying is not an occasional unpleasantness, a round of teasing that fades with time or a bout of irritation on the part of a normally even-tempered supervisor. It is a term used to describe "interactions between organizational members that are characterized by **repeated** hostile verbal and nonverbal...behaviors," resulting in, among other things, "the targets' sense of him/herself as a competent worker [being] negatively affected" (emphasis mine).¹ Bullying in the workplace is marked by the consistent employment of injurious actions and activities such as those listed below in Table 1.1. Its "consequences are serious, including harm (health, social, or economic) to individuals and interference with productive work (an undermining of an employer's business interest)."²

Table 1.1 Examples of workplace abuse and aggression behaviors³

Behavioral category	Behavioral examples
Verbal/active/direct	Name calling, use of derogatory terms Subject to insulting jokes Belittled intellectually, talked down to Criticized harshly, attacked verbally in private or public; put down in front of others Sworn at Lied to, deceived

¹ Loreleigh Keashly, "Interpersonal and Systemic Aspects of Emotional Abuse at Work: The Target's Perspective," *Violence and Victims* 16, no. 3 (2001): 234.

² Gary Namie, "The Challenge of Workplace Bullying," *Employment Relations Today* 34, no. 2 (2007): 43.

³ Modified from Loreleigh Keashley and Karen Jagatic, "By Any Other Name: American Perspectives on Workplace Bullying," in *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice*, ed. Dieter Zapf (London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2003), 38, table 2.1.

	Yelled at, shouted at Interrupted when speaking, working Pressured to change personal life, beliefs, opinions
Verbal/active/indirect	Treated unfairly Subject to false accusations, rumors Attempts made to turn others against the target
Verbal/passive/direct	You or your contributions ignored; silent treatment
Verbal/passive/indirect	Had memos, phone calls ignored Been given little or no feedback, guidance Failing to pass on information needed by the target
Physical/active/direct	Glared at Physically assaulted (e.g., kicked, bitten, hit) Subject to sexual harassment Subject to racial harassment
Physical/active/indirect	Theft or destruction of property Deliberately assigned work overload Deliberately consuming resources needed by target
Physical/passive/indirect	Expected to work with unreasonable deadlines, lack of resources Causing others to delay action on matters of importance to target

Due to the ongoing and profoundly psychologically taxing nature of their hostile work experience, victims of workplace bullying are more prone to suffer from stress-related illnesses, like hypertension.⁴ If victims of workplace bullying are already struggling with sleeplessness, depression, anxiety, issues related to adult attention deficit disorder or significant relationships, these situations tend to worsen.⁵ Victims of workplace bullying miss work more frequently than their colleagues and file more

⁴ Sarah J. Tracy, Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik, and Jess K. Alberts, "Nightmares, Demons, and Slaves: Exploring the Painful Metaphors of Workplace Bullying," *Management Communication Quarterly* : McQ 20, no. 2 (2006): 149-150.

⁵ Keashley and Jagatic, 52-56.

workers compensation claims.⁶ Workplace bullying can overtax victims' abilities to soothe themselves. Victims will report panic attacks, difficulty concentrating, excessive rumination and worry, tearfulness, stomach pains, headaches, and so on. Indeed, the experience of being targeted by a workplace bully can be incredibly disempowering, as many "aspects of [the experience] – choice of targets, timing of onset and cessation, tactics, intensity, and explanations for it – are controlled by the perpetrator."⁷ Its victims "do not invite or benefit from the unwarranted attacks."⁸ They are also frequently unable to prevent the bullying behavior from changing their employment status. "Seventy-seven percent of bullied targets" will leave their jobs — "whether because they quit, were terminated or left through constructive discharge."⁹ The Workplace Bullying Institute, a Washington-based research and legislative advocacy organization, reports that 35% of the American workforce has experienced bullying on the job.¹⁰ (Other researchers put this number higher.)¹¹ These are startling statistics, especially as the

⁶ Tracy et al., "Nightmares, Demons, and Slaves: Exploring the Painful Metaphors of Workplace Bullying," 149. See also Denise Salin, "Ways of Explaining Workplace Bullying: A Review of Enabling, Motivating and Precipitating Structures and Processes in the Work Environment," *Human Relations* 56, no. 10 (2003): 1213.

⁷ Namie, "The Challenge of Workplace Bullying."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Laura Walker, "Beyond the Playground: When Bullying Elbows Its Way into the Workplace," *EHS Today*, no. April (2013): 32.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Karl Aquino and Scott Douglas, "Identity Threat and Antisocial Behavior in Organizations: The Moderating Effects of Individual Differences, Aggressive Modeling, and Hierarchical Status," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 90, no. 1 (2003): 195; Al-Karim Samnani, "Embracing New Directions in Workplace Bullying Research: A Paradigmatic Approach," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 22, no. 1 (2013): 119.

behavior being measured here goes far beyond what might be described as “low intensity” acts of workplace incivility: intermittent rudeness or discourtesy.¹²

In order to help victims begin the process of discerning what their bullies are up to, pastors need to be clear about what constitutes workplace bullying, when and where it tends to crop up, and why certain people, more so than others, may attract the attention of bullies. Experts on organizational behavior have the following to say about workplace bullying’s characteristics and causes:

1. The behavior in question has to be persistent for it to be considered bullying.¹³ Bullies need to engage in repeated acts of hostility, not just one. They need to have engaged in these acts for an extended period of time. The actions need to represent a pattern of behavior. Finally, the behavior needs to escalate, becoming more frequent, more anxiety-producing, and/or more serious to be considered bullying.
2. Bullying behavior is intended, as opposed to accidental. Workplace bullies mean to harm. They are not acting mistakenly, nor does their behavior constitute a misunderstanding on their victims’ part.¹⁴
3. Workplace bullying represents a misuse of power.¹⁵ Although bullies do not necessarily need to be their victims’ supervisors or bosses, they do need to enjoy some form of ascendancy over their victims, such that it is difficult, and potentially even impossible, for victims to address their bullies’ behavior.

¹² Lynne M. Andersson and Christine M. Pearson, "Tit for Tat? The Spiraling Effect of Incivility in the Workplace," *The Academy of Management Review* 24, no. 3 (1999): 457.

¹³ Keashley and Jagatic, 38.

¹⁴ Joel H. Neuman and Robert A. Baron, "Workplace Violence and Workplace Aggression: Evidence Concerning Specific Forms, Potential Causes, and Preferred Targets," *Journal of Management* 24, no. 3 (1998): 394-395; Rebecca J. Bennett and Sandra L. Robinson, "Development of a Measure of Workplace Deviance," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 85, no. 3 (2000): 349; Lilia M. Cortina et al., "Incivility in the Workplace: Incidence and Impact," *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 6, no. 1 (2001): 64.

¹⁵ Cortina et al., "Incivility in the Workplace: Incidence and Impact," 75; Loreleigh Keashly, "Emotional Abuse in the Workplace," *Journal of Emotional Abuse* 1, no. 1 (1997): 96.

4. Bullying behavior is norm-breaking behavior.¹⁶ It frustrates, not just victims', but most people's expectations of what counts as fair and ethical conduct. Victims of workplace bullying will attempt to exchange pleasantries with bullies. They will be careful to greet the bully and to thank him or her for help or guidance. But instead of being greeted or thanked in return, as people would normally expect, victims will encounter hostility.
5. Workplace bullying has many potential causes. It can be a function of the personalities involved.¹⁷ Studies show that workplace bullies often feel insecure around their victims.¹⁸ Victims, for their part, may not realize the degree to which their punctiliousness or perfectionism threatens their bullies.¹⁹ Bullying behavior can be the byproduct of certain types of organizational stress or poor leadership.²⁰ Some scholars argue that, at the end of the day, there is no workplace bullying without management's permission.²¹ Bullies have bosses, too. These look the other way, and problems develop. Finally, workplace bullying can be influenced by culture. Some cultures (or sub-cultures within larger cultures) may believe that bullying is what it takes to get the job done, and consider it a provocation to more bullying when victims, knowingly or unknowingly, challenge this cultural norm.²²

¹⁶ Bennett and Robinson, "Development of a Measure of Workplace Deviance," 349; Bennett J. Tepper, "Consequences of Abusive Supervision," *The Academy of Management Journal* 43, no. 2 (2000): 179-180; Keashly, "Emotional Abuse in the Workplace," 95; Cortina et al., "Incivility in the Workplace: Incidence and Impact," 64.

¹⁷ Karl Aquino, "Structural and Individual Determinants of Workplace Victimization: The Effects of Hierarchical Status and Conflict Management Style," *Journal of Management* 26, no. 2 (2000): 189; Cortina et al., "Incivility in the Workplace: Incidence and Impact," 66.

¹⁸ Roy F. Baumeister, Laura Smart, and Joseph M. Boden, "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression: The Dark Side of High Self-Esteem," *Psychological Review* 103, no. 1 (1996): 8.

¹⁹ Eugene Kim and Theresa M. Glomb, "Get Smarty Pants: Cognitive Ability, Personality, and Victimization," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 95, no. 5 (2010): 889-890.

²⁰ Michael Sheehan, "Workplace Bullying: Responding with Some Emotional Intelligence," *International Journal of Manpower* 20, no. 1/2 (1999): 57-59; Neuman and Baron, "Workplace Violence and Workplace Aggression: Evidence Concerning Specific Forms, Potential Causes, and Preferred Targets," 403-404.

²¹ Keashly, "Emotional Abuse in the Workplace," 112-113.

²² Neuman and Baron, "Workplace Violence and Workplace Aggression: Evidence Concerning Specific Forms, Potential Causes, and Preferred Targets," 403; Tepper, "Consequences of Abusive Supervision," 179; Keashly, "Emotional Abuse in the Workplace," 111; Al-Karim Samnani, "The Early Stages of Workplace Bullying and How It Becomes Prolonged: The Role of Culture in Predicting Target Responses," *Journal of Business Ethics* 113, no. 1 (2013): 128-129.

Given these observations about the role of power in the workplace, for example, and intent's being a distinguishing mark of bullying behavior, pastors should seek answers to questions like these if they think someone they serve may be being bullied on the job:

1. What is happening exactly, how frequently are these behaviors occurring, when did they start, are there various behaviors in play, and does the behavior seem to have gotten worse over time? (Questions related to the issue of persistence.)
2. Do you (the pastor) think the behavior could be accidental? Is it possible that the victim could be misunderstanding what is happening? Or is it hard to see how this could be possible? (Questions related to the issue of intent.)
3. Is the victim dependent in any way on the bully? What would happen to the victim if the bully took a disliking to him or her? Could the victim lose or become markedly less effective in his or her job? (Questions related to power and dependency.)
4. How do the victim's colleagues react to the behavior when they witness it? Do they act like they do not notice it? Extend the victim silent sympathy? Join in? (Questions related to workplace culture.)
5. Does management know about the behavior? Has management, to the victim's knowledge, ever sanctioned anyone for behaving similarly towards someone else? Does management join in with the behavior? (Questions related to management's attitudes and efficacy.)
6. Does the victim strike you as "conscientious, literal-minded, and somewhat unsophisticated" — and yet at the same time highly skilled and/or qualified?²³ Does he or she appear to lack social skills? Would you characterize the victim's style as passive, aggressive or assertive? (Questions related to victim's personality type.)

²³ Carroll M. Brodsky, *The Harassed Worker* (New York: Lexington Books, 1976), 89.

7. When the victim extends kindness to the bully, what does the victim get in return? (Question related to the issue of norm-breaking.)
8. Do you sense insecurity in the person or people you think may be bullying the victim? Has the victim embarrassed them in some way? Have they (the bully or bullies) recently ascended to their new position? (Questions related to bully/bullies' personality type.)
9. Is the victim's industry undergoing large-scale, industry-wide changes involving significant restructuring or the curtailing of business? (Question related to organizational stress.)

The novel counseling approach I propose in this thesis does not just call for victims of workplace bullying to learn new observational skills and a language rich enough to enable victims to put these new skills to use. Their pastors will also need to cultivate the ability to look deeply into a situation for the subtle signs that a management team is colluding with bullies in their targeting of victims. Initially, victims may only bring snapshots to pastors: little slices of stories about the way a particular colleague tends to ignore them in the presence of other employees. Pastors will need to know what these behaviors can mean: when they are accidental, and when they are intended to harm and exclude.

1.2 Living with the psalms

The psalms have many uses in pastoral care. They can be a profound resource for people grieving the loss of a loved one, as the Psalter's emotional honesty encourages the bereaved to give vent to whatever feelings they may have, good, bad or ugly,

towards God or the person they have lost. For those who struggle with rage at some injustice, the psalms say — I know exactly how you feel. I have been there!

¹Why, O Lord, do you stand far off?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?
²In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor—
let them be caught in the schemes they have devised. (Ps. 10:1-2)

In the midst of a church culture of largely upbeat gospel, praise and worship songs, there is a rawness about the psalms capable of reminding people what a covenant faith can sound like. At times sad, at times angry, at times lonely: the struggling can find themselves in these pages.

The psalter is also a good resource for people dealing with hostility at work. The psalter is honest about the existence of antagonism and opposition in human society. It does not whitewash the reality that people can choose to relate to others as enemies. Indeed, in the psalms, happiness is not so much a result of good health and a good living as a person's capacity to distance him- or herself from the wicked, those who give bad advice, take bad paths and sit in the seat of scoffers. Interpersonal wisdom is a key to happiness in the psalms. The psalter is aware of the fact that human relationships exist in complex hierarchies in which the relatively more powerful frequently oppress those beneath them for no good reason. As in life, so in the psalter, there can be an unjust, lopsided aspect to human interactions. The good guy does not always win (at least in the short term) in the psalms. These texts can be eye-openers for victims of workplace bullying, alerting them to the following dynamics:

- Hostile people are often good at hiding their true intentions.
- It may not be possible to get hostile people to acknowledge other people's viewpoints.
- Cultivating detachment, not taking a stand, is often a victim's best defense against being targeted.

Victims of workplace bullying often remark that they find their situation bewildering. Or they will repeatedly express surprise at a colleague's behavior. At moments like these, it becomes clear: part of what makes their situation so stressful is the fact that they genuinely seem not to know what to call what is happening to them. Often victims have so thoroughly internalized the idea that people are basically good and well-meaning, and that there is no such thing as sin (only mistakes and misunderstandings), they lack a working vocabulary for wrongdoing. Hand a victim of workplace bullying a copy of Psalm 22 and talk with him or her about the various historical reasons Israel would have employed language of this kind, Jesus' choice to speak its words from the cross, and the importance theologically of words like justice, evil, wisdom and foolishness, and a look of relief and also recognition may cross the victim of workplace bullying's face. It can be an "ah ha" moment for victims, and the beginning of a new way of responding to their situation.

Many victims of workplace bullying have been trained to avoid closely observing others' problematic behavior in the interests of being nonjudgmental. It is almost as if, not just physically, but mentally, they will turn away and look another direction. To help turn their gazes back, I have developed a system of journaling and

visualization exercises based on five psalms, each of which has something insightful to say about either how to identify when one is being bullied or how to respond more creatively in the midst of this dynamic.

1.3 Recognize, then respond

There are two basic phases in the process I propose. Phase One is designed to help victims of workplace bullying recognize that they are in fact being bullied. They are not the losers they think they are, incompetent, stupid, worthless or bad. They are victims, like the middle school student who, for whatever reason, has become a clique's Public Enemy Number 1. During this phase, pastors will have victims consider the degree to which victims' experiences at work align with the experiences of the psalmist in Psalms 10, 22 and 36. Is there evidence of a pack mentality at their workplace? Do colleagues talk about transparency and open communication, but scheme behind closed doors? What does it feel like to be at work? Is it non-stop tension from the moment victims leave the house in the morning until, exhausted from worry, victims fall into bed at night, no matter how good their work product?

Victims' pastors may feel like it is patently obvious what is going on with the victim. (And these pastors may not be alone. Sometimes it seems like everyone, the victim's spouse, parents, friends, has a better sense of the situation than the victim.) But pastors should resist the impulse to tell victims during this first phase what the pastor thinks is happening. A pastor's goal during Phase One is to position the victim to be able

to see the bullying dynamics for him- or herself. Victims of workplace bullying are already being treated as if their perspective is untrustworthy. All they need is another person to make them feel foolish, this time because they are too dumb to realize that they are being targeted. A pastor's task is to build up victims' confidence again: to hone and affirm victims' expertise regarding their own lives. Phase One's psalms and exercises are covered in Chapters Two through Four.

Phase Two begins when victims of workplace bullying have decided that their experience does in fact resemble the psalmist's in these three psalms. They are targets of bullying, and the difficulties they have been encountering on the job will not be resolved by more hard work and a better attitude. At this point, victims' scriptural study will shift from diagnosis to response. Pastors will encourage victims to consider the potential value of learning how to reframe their experiences in time as the psalmist does. Pastors will also introduce victims to some of the theological moves the psalmist finds comforting and empowering in the midst of his or her sufferings. Again, the point here will not be to tell the victim how to think or feel, but to give him or her the opportunity to test out the wisdom the psalmist has gleaned from the psalmist's experience of being bullied and oppressed. Phase Two's psalms and exercises are covered in Chapters Five and Six.

1.4 Journaling and visualization

Throughout both phases, I propose that pastors rely on journaling and visualization exercises to ensure that victims are being given the time and space to process the five psalms and their experiences for themselves. If there is one thing I have learned as a teacher, hearing, reading, or even talking about new information is rarely enough to lock it in. People need to have the chance to put the new idea or concept down on paper and to apply it to the specifics of their own lives. They need the opportunity to ponder the psalms in relation to their situation deeply, to re-visualize scenes and conversations, not fretfully, or to beat themselves up again, but analytically, in order to mine these scenes and conversations for data.

Exercises like visualization and journaling also enable victims to practice looking at their lives through a different, scriptural lens from a safe place: their home. It is frightening to be bullied. It is demoralizing. It is confusing. It is not a situation that lends itself to cogent, on-the-spot analysis. There can be shame. Journaling and visualization are activities people associate with privacy and set-apartness. In order to do them well, people know that they will need to be out of the situation to a certain degree. In a culture that can be so demanding of people, so insistent that people stand up for themselves, and not let others treat them disrespectfully, it can be a relief for victims of workplace bullying to be told that it is okay to disengage for a while — and not only okay, but wise.

Pastors unfamiliar with the idea of assigning “homework” in a counseling situation may wonder if people will really do it. In my experience, they absolutely will — especially when they understand why you are asking them to do it. People are hungrier than we often realize for concrete guidance and practices. They want to create a record of their experiences that is more than a half hour’s worth of talk over a cup of coffee. Several years ago, I got into the habit of making sure that people coming to me for advice or counsel left my office or dining room table with something in their hands: a diagram showing them how decisions tend to get made or a quote from scripture we had found especially compelling during our conversation. My staff and I keep copies of books and worksheets we have found helpful to hand out to people. When life is chaotic, it can mean a lot to struggling people that their pastor cares enough to try to bring a sense of system to their problems, while at the same time respecting the fact that they are the ones ultimately who will need to learn how to tell their story and to interpret their life in faithful, hopeful and loving ways.

As far as how specifically to integrate these practices into one’s counseling ministry, I have several suggestions. First, have copies of the five psalms for your counselees to go over with you, one per counseling session, so that the two of you can reflect together on the insights I identify in the chapters that follow. Notice: you will not be approaching your discussion of these psalms as you would a group Bible study, looking to harvest as many different interpretations of the texts as possible. Your role

will be more directive. You will be pointing out things. Teaching victims about bullying. Showing them the different rhetorical moves the psalmist makes and the different ways he or she chooses to portray hostility. You will want to make sure that victims are getting their questions answered and that you are listening to them, and asking questions in turn, when the topic turns to their experiences at work. After all, they are the experts on their bosses and coworkers, not you. But you will also respect the fact that they have come to you for help, and not just to watch you gaze at them with concern as they haltingly try to describe what they think may be happening to them.

So Step One, go over the psalms together one by one, taking your time to let the psalmist's insights and wisdom sink in. Step Two, plan on spending some time the first session coaching your counselee on how to journal in order to take the mystery out of this spiritual discipline. Emphasize that he or she will not be turning this writing in for a grade. Tell him or her:

- It is fine not to write in complete sentences. In fact, sometimes it is better to jot down phrases and lists of words. A focus on style or correct spelling and punctuation can clutter up the mind, making it hard to remember details.
- Write, but then read and analyze what you have written. Ask yourself, are patterns emerging? Draw circles or squares around observations that strike you as similar. Put discreet acts into larger categories and name these categories: "ignoring," "undermining," "displays of disrespect or anger," and so on.
- The journaling prompts will present you with a lot of different options to consider. Choose the ones that resonate with you. Do not feel as if you have to answer every question or explore every scenario.

- Be gentle with yourself: it is not easy to acknowledge dependency, weakness or foolishness. Celebrate the courage you are displaying in facing this painful situation.

When it comes to the exercises that also involve people's visualizing scenes or settings as a way of reminding themselves of what they have experienced, consider making these suggestions:

- You may need to set a timer to keep you focused. If you still find yourself drifting, break the exercise into smaller parts, and alternate shorter periods of visualization with journaling.
- To keep the pace of your visualizations slow and detail-oriented, try not to imagine the space or the experience as a series of snapshots. Instead, imagine yourself walking through the space or experience slowly and methodically, as if you were a detective analyzing the scene of a crime.
- If you are still finding it hard to sustain a visualization practice, do not despair. Treat the visualization prompts like essay questions and write your responses to them. As with the journaling prompts, focus on the questions and scenarios that resonate the most with you. Don't feel as if you have to cover every base.
- When sad or angry feelings bubble to the surface, notice them, take ten slow, easy breaths, then gently turn your thoughts back to the exercise.

People may wonder whether you intend to read what they have written. Explain that you will only do so if there is something they want you to read. Primarily, the exercises are to help them think more deeply about the psalmist's insights into hostile relationships and victims' experiences, and also to practice new ways of responding to these experiences. More than likely, there will be things that come up in the course of their journaling that they will want to discuss with you: things that they noticed or that

occurred to them that they have questions about. Encourage them to share these observations and questions with you when you meet.

Finally, you may want to furnish people with a notebook for their journaling when you give them their first round of prompts. Keeping everything they are writing in one place can be another way to help them feel that they have begun the process of stepping away from the chaos of their bully's hostility into the orderly refuge of God, scripture and the church.

1.5 Time heals wounds, not impatient pastors

People do not recover from workplace bullying easily, especially if the experience has gone on for years or has resulted in the loss of a job. Workplace bullying can leave profound scars. There is something devastating about being mistreated and then being made to feel as if somehow you did something to deserve it. Ask adults willing to admit to being bullied as children how long it took them to get over it, and they may tell you that at forty-five they can still see the effects of those painful experiences on their self-esteem. The process I describe in this thesis is not intended to be a quick fix. It is also not intended to take the place of a thorough review of a victim's physical or mental health by a doctor, if this is warranted. It is instead an attempt to introduce victims to a friend, the psalmist, who knows something about the situation in which victims of workplace bullying find themselves, and can speak to them as a fellow

traveler, as well as heir to a tradition that is itself no stranger to the experience of being bullied.

That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors, "You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy; that is why they cry, 'Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.'" (Exodus 5:6–8)

1.6 Other possible applications

The exercises and observations I make in this thesis are designed with the workplace in mind. This does not mean, however, that the process I map out has no relevance for other settings. Much of what I discuss here in relation to the workplace applies to high schools and churches. Pastors should feel free to adapt these exercises and scriptural interpretations as needed, bearing in mind, however, the importance of priming people's imaginations with concrete details. Victims of bullying of every age are often in a state akin to shock. They may not be able to launch into an in-depth analysis of their situation by virtue of being asked, how are things at school? They may need someone to be patiently curious about their lives, and able imaginatively to ask the kinds of questions capable of illuminating victims' experiences: specific questions, about lives led in specific places among specific people.

1.7. Concluding cautionary remarks

Not everyone purporting to be bullied at work is a victim of the dynamics I describe in this thesis. For example, some people will portray themselves as workplace

targets when what is really happening is that they are being sanctioned, either formally or informally, for their own aggressive behavior. A coworker will finally have had enough and call them out. A supervisor will, with good reason, recommend that they undergo sexual harassment training, and they may construe the situation as one in which they are being unfairly persecuted. Pastors will need to be discerning, especially early in their conversations with people about their work lives, and remember that pastors are hearing only half the story.

Pastors will also need to bear in mind throughout this process that the psalmic language of the “wicked” versus “the righteous” is not intended to justify in any situation a victim’s seeking revenge. The psalmist employs this language to give voice to an aspect of the human experience that too often goes unstated because of its association with the relatively disempowered: the experience of interpersonal injustice. Some victims will find this language therapeutic. Others will not. If pastors find themselves working with a victim for whom this language is too stark and polarizing, they should reorient their counseling around a different set of scripture texts. The aim of this process is peace and the renewal of the victim’s love for and trust in God, not a further drowning in negativity and rage.

Finally, pastors should remain alive to the possibility that some form of reconciliation may occur between victim and bully over the course of the pastor’s work with the victim. This is not always possible, nor is it to be pushed in a naïve manner, but

because the grace of God, which can be found in a life newly lived through the lens of scripture, may open a way to reconciliation when no way previously existed.

2. The hidden bully

In Chapter Two, readers will explore the insights and rhetorical moves of Psalm 10, and examine one of the reasons why victims can at times struggle to discern if they are being bullied. The focus issue for this chapter is the hidden bully. Chapter Two concludes with the sample journaling and visualization exercise, “first day at work.”

2.1 Background on Psalm 10

James L. Mays argues that Psalm 10 should not be treated as an individual psalm of lament, as it forms an acrostic poem with Psalm 9 and features many of the same “motifs and phrases.”¹ According to Mays, Psalm 9 is a congregational paean to God’s protection of Israel and rebuking of “the nations,” which ends with a prayer that God continue to keep “mortals” from “prevailing.”

¹⁹Rise up, O Lord! Do not let mortals prevail;
let the nations be judged before you.
²⁰Put them in fear, O Lord;
let the nations know that they are only human. (Ps. 9:19-20)

Psalm 10, by extension, is an attempt to personify Israel’s political woes by putting these into the mouth of a lowly, mistreated individual.² In doing so, Psalm 10 invites the congregation to give voice to what it means to live as a nation in the clutches of a foreign power. It enables the congregation to acknowledge the very real impact of

¹ James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Logos ed., Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), under “Let Not Mortals Prevail (Psalms 9 and 10).”

² Ibid.

empire on their lives. But the psalm should not be read as an individual's cry for help in the midst of his or her personal enemies.

Hans-Joachim Kraus, on the other hand, notes that Psalm 10 maintains many of the traditional features of an individual psalm of lament. Although these have "now in part assumed the form of an extensive instruction for the audience," and the identity of the wicked has become "the nations," the psalm still employs "illustrations" and "formulations" capable of illuminating an individual's experience of hostility.³ Kraus likens Psalm 10 to Lamentations 3, a text that also uses the language of individual grief to give voice to national tragedy.⁴

¹I am one who has seen affliction
under the rod of God's wrath;
²he has driven and brought me
into darkness without any light;
³against me alone he turns his hand,
again and again, all day long.
⁴He has made my flesh and my skin waste away,
and broken my bones;
⁵he has besieged and enveloped me
with bitterness and tribulation;
⁶he has made me sit in darkness
like the dead of long ago. (Lam. 3:1-6)

That this language of "flesh and bones" has entered the communal context does not mean that it has lost its relevance for the individual, according to Kraus. It means that its relevance has been expanded beyond the individual to include the communal.

³ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *A Continental Commentary: Psalms 1-59*, Logos ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), under "Setting."

⁴ Ibid.

Indeed, to a great extent, the rhetorical power of texts like Psalm 10 and Lamentations 3 depends on their ability to tap into the conventions of individual lament. It is these texts' first person perspectives ("my flesh and my skin") that enable readers to articulate the relationship between unjust political power and personal suffering. My work with Psalm 10 will focus on these holdovers from traditional individual psalms of lament and what they have to say about victims' experience of being bullied on the job.

2.2 The struggle to understand

Bullying behavior can be subtle.⁵ It can be hard to identify the point at which it crossed the line from joke to harassment, or from legitimate managerial prerogative to an attempt to intimidate. Bullying in the workplace can take many forms: increasing or decreasing workload, withholding information, isolating the victim from the social support afforded by participation in work groups, and so on.⁶ It is also often abetted by the presence in the workplace of a culture of evaluation and "self-study," which is not itself an object of evaluation. (The annual performance review committee reviews others, but no one reviews it.) Studies show that bullies in the nursing profession will use an organization's procedures and institutions of review to harm their victims' reputations.⁷

⁵ Sarah Dobson, "Workplace Bullying," *Administrative Assistant's Update*, (2011): 3. See also Samnani, "The Early Stages of Workplace Bullying and How It Becomes Prolonged: The Role of Culture in Predicting Target Responses," 120-121.

⁶ Salin, "Ways of Explaining Workplace Bullying: A Review of Enabling, Motivating and Precipitating Structures and Processes in the Work Environment," 1215.

⁷ Marie Hutchinson et al., "Workplace Bullying in Nursing: Towards a More Critical Organisational Perspective," *Nursing Inquiry* 13, no. 2 (2006): 121-122.

Indeed, it is a sad fact that perpetrators of workplace bullying often have access to “networks” of power through which they can attack their victims with the unknowing support of colleagues.⁸ Moreover, victims of workplace bullying report that perpetrators often seem adept at cultivating positive relationships with supervisors, colleagues or Human Resource professionals, making it difficult for victims to find witnesses to corroborate their version of what is going on.⁹ As a result, victims of workplace bullying often find themselves in a very confusing situation, struggling to understand what is happening, who is at fault, and how to seek redress.

2.3 Looking like God

Key to understanding how Psalm 10 can enable victims of workplace bullying to take a closer look at their bullies, with an eye to ferreting out the more hidden aspects of their bullies’ behavior and intentions, is the way verse one’s second person address to God leads into verse three’s third person analysis of the wicked. Psalm 10 begins with a provocative question, “Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” According to the psalmist, there are a lot of things going on in the world that the Lord should be attending to. “Fraud, extortion, cruelty, violence, and all kind of injustice” run rampant.¹⁰ “Ungodly and wicked men, being intoxicated with

⁸ Ibid., 122.

⁹ Tracy et al., “Nightmares, Demons, and Slaves: Exploring the Painful Metaphors of Workplace Bullying,” 166. See also Dobson, “Workplace Bullying,” 3.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans., James Anderson (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 1:133.

their prosperity, have shaken off all fear of God, and think that they may do whatever they please with impunity.”¹¹

²In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor—
let them be caught in the schemes they have devised.
³For the wicked boast of the desires of their heart,
those greedy for gain curse and renounce the Lord.
⁴In the pride of their countenance the wicked say, “God will not seek it out”;
all their thoughts are, “There is no God.”
⁵Their ways prosper at all times;
your judgments are on high, out of their sight;
as for their foes, they scoff at them.
⁶They think in their heart, “We shall not be moved;
throughout all generations we shall not meet adversity.”
⁷Their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression;
under their tongues are mischief and iniquity.
⁸They sit in ambush in the villages;
in hiding places they murder the innocent.
Their eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;
⁹they lurk in secret like a lion in its covert;
they lurk that they may seize the poor;
they seize the poor and drag them off in their net.
¹⁰They stoop, they crouch,
and the helpless fall by their might.
¹¹They think in their heart, “God has forgotten,
he has hidden his face, he will never see it.” (Ps. 10:2-11)

Given all this stooping and crouching, it is high time for God to come out of hiding and do something about the wicked, cries the psalmist. And yet, note what is happening while this God is away. The psalmist is giving him- or herself permission, with God absent, to look at the wicked from God’s perspective, a perspective much more searching than is typical for a human being. The psalmist asks, “Why, O Lord, do

¹¹ Ibid.

you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” and then busily proceeds to describe exactly what this standoffish God should be attending to. The wicked are hypocrites. They pretend to be so forthright and “out there” with their intentions and desires while they are not at all above deceit and secrecy. The lives of the wicked give the lie to the Book of Proverbs’ faith that wealth accrues to the righteous, and thus can be taken as a sign of character.

²¹Misfortune pursues sinners,
but prosperity rewards the righteous. (Prov. 13:21)

²²The good leave an inheritance to their children’s children,
but the sinner’s wealth is laid up for the righteous. (Prov. 13:22)

²⁵The righteous have enough to satisfy their appetite,
but the belly of the wicked is empty. (Prov. 13:25)

The psalmist’s enemies are rolling in it, due to their willingness to “lurk in secret like a lion...that they may seize the poor...and drag them off in their net” (Ps. 10:9). With God seemingly in hiding, the psalmist may be angry, but the psalmist has also begun to pick up on the subtleties of the wicked person’s behavior: its tendency towards hypocrisy. The psalmist is now aware that power and wealth do not always accrue to the just or worthy.

2.4 When bullies grow up

Children bully their peers for the most part openly. They taunt them to their faces or attack them physically as victims walk home from school. As bullies age, however, they become more careful to cover their tracks. Teenage bullies post

embarrassing pictures of their victims online, but from Twitter accounts set up specifically for this purpose and anonymously. By the time bullies make their way into the workplace, many of them have become experts in the art of concealing their intentions. It is a rare workplace that allows the open bullying of one staff person by another. Bosses do not get to taunt administrative assistants like children in a playground. They have to find more ambiguous ways of hurting their victims — like overloading them with work or consistently setting deadlines impossible to meet. This is why it is important that victims of workplace bullying be empowered to gain insight into the motives of the people with whom they work. At times, it is only through doing so that victims will be able to discern that what is happening to them is not just a misunderstanding or accident.

2.5 A vocabulary lesson and shift in perspective

Psalm 10 gives its readers a template to apply to a situation that can be difficult to read. Psalm 10 is full of evocative words and images: scheme, ambush, hiding place, covert, net, stooping, crouching, lurking, stealth. It provides its readers with a vocabulary appropriate to hypocrisy: boast, pride, countenance, heart, deceit, mischief. In this sense, Psalm 10 exemplifies what Calvin describes as the “spectacle-like” nature

of scripture – its ability to bring things into focus that might otherwise remain a mystery.¹²

Psalm 10's absentee landlord of a God also helps victims of workplace bullying deal with "covert operators," bullies who have mastered the art of concealing their intentions, working through other people, and/or insisting that they are doing one thing (helping) when in actuality they are doing something else entirely (hurting). Psalm 10 positions its readers to scrutinize the phenomenon of the wicked in a close, searching and thorough fashion. There is a lot going on in the psalmist's decision to accuse God of negligence. It is not simply the tradition modeling what faithful relationship looks like, or giving people permission to "be real" with God. Lament of this kind inspires people to look beneath the surface, to check for the places where people could lie concealed, and to listen for the words the wicked speak to themselves, not just what they say when the boss is around. By licensing people to remind God what God should be seeing and doing, Psalm 10 provides victims with the motivation to observe the world as God does – to come out of hiding and to stand closer to the bully than they might normally be comfortable doing – in order to see what he or she is up to.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans., Henry Beveridge, Logos ed. (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 83-84.

2.6 Review concepts

In preparing victims for this chapter's exercises, pastors will want to review with them the following points, drawn from the analysis of Psalm 10:

- People often hide their true intentions — especially when these are hostile.
- Therefore, it is often necessary for targets to become more skillful observers.
- One way of doing so involves the conceit of having the target attempt to imagine what the psalmist might find to lament about the target's workplace and bullying colleague or supervisor.

2.7 Sample journaling and visualization exercise for Psalm 10

Psalm 10's sample exercise is designed to bolster victims' abilities to notice and analyze the more subtle dynamics in play in their work relationships; for example, hints that they are dealing with a passive-aggressive colleague or boss. Not all victims will want to approach a more in-depth, Psalm 10-based analysis of their situation in this way. Pastors will need to be flexible in using this exercise. At the same time, pastors need to realize that many victims of workplace bullying are not skillful observers. They do not naturally stop to think about why a person might have chosen to have her Mustang's vanity license plate read, "Pass Me." They will need their pastors to give them an excuse or reason carefully to scrutinize their experiences; for example, by providing them with an attentive and insightful observer persona, such as the psalmist, from which to journal about their work experiences. They may also need their pastors to provide them with examples of what a hidden bully might look like on the job, so as to be able to have something to compare their experience against (see section 2.6.2).

When I was in my early twenties, I spent a summer working at an inpatient psychiatric hospital for adolescents. I was intrigued by the fact that patient orders frequently included such instructions as, “do not allow patient to stand within an arm’s length of other patients or staff.” One day I asked my supervisor why this was. I still recall his response: “Some of these teens do not know how to gauge other people’s expectations for personal space. They won’t realize that they are crowding people until it is too late and they have made people uncomfortable. These teens need us to teach them where to stand in relation to other people.”

Victims of workplace bullying can be like these close-standing teenagers. There is something they do not know how to do; namely, recognize the subtle signs of hostility in other people. As their pastors, we may find this surprising or chalk it up to naiveté, but we cannot take this tack and still hope to be helpful. Psalm 10 has suggested some ways pastors might go about training victims’ eyes to be more aware of their colleagues’ behaviors and intentions. The following exercise attempts to take advantage of these suggestions.

2.7.1 Exercise: first day at work

Imagine the psalmist taking you around to introduce you to your coworkers as if it were your first day at your new job. The psalmist has just stopped by the office or workspace of your difficult colleague or supervisor. What does the psalmist tell you or point out about this person? Bear in mind that the psalmist has proven to be quite

observant and will have a lot more to say about this person than what you might have observed your first day on the job.

So be especially attentive to what the psalmist has to say —

- About how your difficult colleague or supervisor talks and relates others.
- About the decor of his or her office or workspace and the style of his or her dress.
- About the way he or she expresses frustration or anger.

Take some time now to write down some of the details the psalmist has pointed out. Then ask yourself the following questions:

- What image or images does your difficult manager or colleague project about his- or herself through his or her clothing or the objects with which he or she surrounds him- or herself at work?
- What seems to be his or her favorite pronoun — I, we, you or they?
- How would you describe the way he or she talks about people when they are not there? Dismissively? Sarcastically? As if he or she cares (except that something seems a little off about his or her concern)?

What does he or she do when he or she gets angry about something? Does he or she speak directly to the people involved? Sit mutely at his or her desk with a sour look on his or her face? Take the anger out on maintenance staff or people with less institutional power? Blame or criticize people, either informally or formally? Attempt to drum up outrage about the situation among other parties, either informally or formally?

Take some notes about the things you are noticing about your difficult colleague or boss now that the psalmist has had a chance to introduce him or her to you, and circle the things you would like to bring up the next time we meet.

2.8 Conclusion

Psalm 10's poignant opening questions and vivid imagery can inspire victims of workplace bullying to ponder whether they have to do with a hidden enemy at work. Psalm 10's wicked are adept at scheming and deceit. They attack from coverts and little out of the way towns. Likewise, some workplace bullies hide their ill will behind institutional processes or employ passive aggressive means to sabotage their victims' effectiveness. Looking at their situations as the psalmist does his or hers in Psalm 10 can help victims of workplace bullying to see what their hidden bullies may be up to.

In the next chapter, we will consider another form of workplace bullying: the dysfunctional pack. Psalm 22 will be our point of entrée into this second topic.

3. The bullying pack

In Chapter Three, readers will ponder the relationship between Psalm 22's metaphors and workplace bullying, and become familiar with a second reason why victims at times struggle to discern if bullies are targeting them. The focus issue for this chapter is the bullying pack. The chapter concludes with the sample journaling and visualization exercises, "zoology" and "body scan."

3.1 *Background on Psalm 22*

Psalm 22 is one of the most famous and oft-quoted psalms in the New Testament. As James L. Mays points out, of eight quotations of the psalms in the gospels five are from Psalm 22.¹ Psalm 22's opening verse is the line Jesus famously speaks from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Moreover, features of the psalm's description of the psalmist's experience appear in the Gospel narrative."² As in Psalm 22, passersby "deride" Jesus by "shaking their heads" at him (Mark 15:29). Passersby mock his faith in God (Matthew 27:43). Finally, the soldiers assigned the task of guarding Jesus "cast lots to divide his clothing" when he dies (Lk. 23:34).

There is an unusual poignancy about Psalm 22's language that leads Hans-Joachim Kraus to argue that it is not so much the psalmist's experience of rejection and social isolation that lies at the root of his or her suffering as it is the psalmist's experience of being abandoned by God.³ Likewise, Mays notes that in many respects the psalmist's

¹ Mays, under "My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me? (Psalm 22)."

² Ibid.

³ Kraus, under "Setting (Psalm 22)."

troubles are not so much human as divine: the psalmist is the butt of others' jokes because foolishly, to their mind, the psalmist has committed his or her cause to God.⁴ Furthermore, Psalm 22's "shifting montage of images evoking suffering and dying" has a "cosmic" feel to it.⁵ It resists being "identified and confined to some specific kind of suffering" like having enemies.⁶ It is too big for this. For these two commentators, there is a terrifying grandness about this psalm that makes it an appropriate vehicle for a story like Christ's, with its harrowing of hell, but perhaps a little too "archetypal" for a person struggling to maintain his or her dignity in a hostile work environment.⁷

Calvin, in his commentary on this psalm, on the other hand, attends carefully to the language the psalmist (whom he construes as David) uses to describe his enemies. "In short," Calvin writes, "David's enemies were so blood-thirsty and cruel, that they more resembled wild beasts than men. [Hence] he calls them not simply *bulls*, but *strong bulls*."⁸ For Calvin, the psalmist (David) is not so much struggling with God as maintaining his faith in the face of bitter challenges from his fellow human beings. Calvin is struck by the "villainy" of the psalmist's enemies.⁹ Calvin states that "the cruelty of his enemies was so insatiable, that beholding a wretched man wasted with grief, and as it were pining away, they took pleasure in feeding their eyes with so sad a

⁴ Mays, under "My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me? (Psalm 22)."

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Kraus, under "Setting (Psalm 22)."

⁸ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 1:371.

⁹ Ibid., 1:376.

spectacle.”¹⁰ While Calvin does argue at points that the experiences the psalmist is undergoing are so extreme they necessarily bring to mind Christ’s sufferings, for Calvin this is not a psalm only about godforsakenness. It is a very real, and keenly drawn portrait of hostility: what it turns people into, and drives them to do. The psalmist “complains of the cruelty and barbarous rage of his enemies.”¹¹ The psalmist registers what it feels like to be victimized by people become “bulls,” “lions,” and “dogs.”

⁶But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.
⁷All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;
⁸“Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver —
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!” (Ps. 22:6-8)

¹²Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
¹³they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.
¹⁴I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
¹⁵my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
¹⁶For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;
¹⁷I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
¹⁸they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots. (Ps. 22:12-18)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 1:370-371.

3.2 The pack instinct

Following in Calvin's footsteps, I too would argue that Psalm 22, despite – or perhaps because of – its hyperbolic language, has a down-to-earth, human side. Among other things, Psalm 22's animal metaphors highlight two things about the experience of workplace bullying for victims and their pastors to consider. First, the phenomenon is not a fair fight between equally privileged and empowered parties. Victims of workplace bullying are often at the mercy of a group of people, united in their hostility towards them. Although studies show that in some workplaces bullying affects retention rates for bystanders as much as victims, in other workplaces bullying is so much a part of the culture that bystanders not only do not quit because of it, they join in.¹² The pack instinct takes over. Social learning and social information processing theorists argue that social context is "the fundamental determinant of behavior."¹³ People use "information in their immediate environment to develop expectations concerning appropriate behavior.... When the environment has many aggressive role models, [even] high status employees may perceive little or no obligation to exercise social restraint."¹⁴ Psalm 22's reference to encircling bulls provides victims with a compelling image with which to inspect their experience for evidence of pack mentality.

¹² Marjan Houshmand et al., "Escaping Bullying: The Simultaneous Impact of Individual and Unit-Level Bullying on Turnover Intentions," *Human Relations* 65, no. 7 (2012): 904. See also Marjo-Riitta Parzefall and Denise M. Salin, "Perceptions of and Reactions to Workplace Bullying: A Social Exchange Perspective," *Human Relations* 63, no. 6 (2010): 762.

¹³ Sandra L. Robinson and Anne M. O'Leary-Kelly, "Monkey See, Monkey Do: The Influence of Work Groups on the Antisocial Behavior of Employees," *The Academy of Management Journal* 41, no. 6 (1998): 660.

¹⁴ Aquino and Douglas, "Identity Threat and Antisocial Behavior in Organizations: The Moderating Effects of Individual Differences, Aggressive Modeling, and Hierarchical Status," 198-199.

3.3 The victim as worm

Psalm 22's animal metaphors also bring to the surface the debilitating nature of bullying, the degree to which it renders its victims powerless, less than human, even lifeless. "But I am a worm," says the psalmist, "and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people" (Ps. 22:6).

¹⁴I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
¹⁵my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death. (Ps. 22:14-15)

Various biblical writers emphasize the value of people's seeing themselves as, in some respect, weak, powerless, even to a certain degree, diseased. Jesus makes the point that, all things being equal, the "well" are less interesting to him than the "sick" (Matt. 9:12). The apostle Paul writes, "whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). For both Jesus and Paul, there is something profound about people's recognizing their vulnerability and powerlessness. It is the beginning of strength, or their "exaltation" (Lk. 18:14).

In Psalm 22, however, something different is going on. The psalmist's description of him- or herself as a "worm" is not just a poetic acknowledgment of the psalmist's human frailty. The psalmist has become a worm in relation to other people. The psalmist's feelings of illness and powerlessness are the result of other people's mistreatment of him or her – their scorn, mocking and head shaking. God may ultimately be the one to lay the psalmist "in the dust of death." But there are also some

people around who have chosen to abuse the psalmist, and this abuse has made him or her feel less than human, like a maggot, a symbol of death.

Psalm 22 contains some of the Psalter's most moving descriptions of what might be described as the physiological impact of hostility: its capacity to turn victims into water, melt their hearts, desiccate and lay them in the dust of death. These images flow naturally from the metaphor of the worm and demonstrate the metaphor's capacity to open the experience of workplace bullying up to analysis. Reading Psalm 22 is like receiving a prompt to do a "body scan," a popular mindfulness practice designed to heighten people's awareness of various bodily sensations.¹⁵ The psalm does not just train people's eyes on the external world; it turns people's gazes inward, to such things as the experience of their mouths' being dry or the sensation of weakness that frequently accompanies situations fraught with anxiety. In contexts in which bullying behavior passes as normal, the body can be a valuable source of information for victims, another way to discern what is happening to them. Psalm 22 reminds victims of workplace bullying to ask themselves, "How am I and how is my body feeling about what is going on here? Is this situation okay? Or is it taking a toll on me physically?"

3.4 Seeing through hyperbole

Psalm 22's language may be an obstacle for some victims of workplace bullying. Depending on people's backgrounds, they may not know what to make of its dramatic

¹⁵ Zindel V. Segal, J. Mark G. Williams, and John D. Teasdale, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression*, Epub ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2013), under "Training in Awareness: Using the Body as a Focus."

images and over-the-top expressions of anguish. It is not everyday that people hear someone uttering words like the following:

¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
²O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest. (Ps. 22:1-2)

Pastors may need to remind victims who have grown up in cultures with negative attitudes towards strong emotional reactions that these are the words Jesus spoke from the cross, and that it is okay to get upset. Pastors may also need to help victims understand the value of this strong language as it relates to situations in which a pack mentality has normalized bullying.

One striking detail about the various gospel narratives featuring the healing of someone blind is the behavior of the crowd. In many of these stories, the crowd attempts to silence the blind person — to prevent him from attracting Jesus’ attention. The Pharisees get upset about the timing of Jesus’ healing of the man with the withered hand, the man with dropsy and the woman with the bad back. They wish these healings would happen on a day other than the Sabbath. Friends and family bring people with demons or paralysis to Jesus, or at the very least, make it known to him that an ill daughter or servant is in need of healing. Blindness, however, seems to exist in a category of its own in the gospels. It is almost as if people have an investment in the blind staying blind. Here is how “the crowd” behaves in Matthew, Mark and Luke:

As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” The crowd sternly ordered

them to be quiet; but they shouted even more loudly, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!" (Matthew 20:29–31)

As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:46–48)

As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." Then he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Luke 18:35–39)

In all three stories, it is a good thing the various blind men were not afraid to keep shouting. Clearly, the crowd was not interested in helping them regain their sight.

Likewise, the pack at work can make it hard for victims to see that the jokes, comments, outbursts and scapegoating are not okay. When everyone joins in, even the egregiously abusive can start to seem normal. Psalm 22's language is shocking and provoking. It jolts readers, but to good purpose. It reminds victims of workplace bullying that it is not just business as usual to be mocked and despised. It is unjust, and a "cause" worthy of being "commit[ted] to the Lord" (Ps. 22:8).

Psalm 22 and Psalm 10 both empower victims to see more about their bullies and work environments. Psalm 10 does this by teeing up a "what if" scenario that invites victims to look as God does, beyond appearances, into hiding places, and under people's tongues. Psalm 22 does this by introducing metaphors and images with the power to contest a culture of not seeing and not acknowledging, first by identifying the pack mentality for what it is (unethical social conditioning), and then by putting a spotlight

on victims' bodies as a reliable source of information about the harmfulness and injustice of the pack's behavior.

3.5 Review concepts

In preparing victims for this chapter's exercises, pastors will want to review with them the following points, drawn from the analysis of Psalm 22:

- Bullies often band together in packs, which can make it difficult at times for targets to realize that they are being treated unjustly.
- Animal metaphors can help targets see the dehumanizing aspect of their experiences for themselves as well as for their antagonists.
- Bullying can exact a physical toll on its targets. Being attentive to this aspect of the experience can also help victims recognize the harmful nature of hostility in environments resistant to acknowledging this to be the case.
- Hyperbolic language is sometimes healing language, as it can help jar people into seeing things in a new light.

3.6 Sample journaling and visualization exercises for Psalm 22

Psalm 22's sample exercises are designed to bring to the surface the painful, chaotic, dehumanizing aspects of the victim's experience, the possibility that he or she may be the target of a pack at work, as well as any symptoms of physical distress the bullying may be causing the victim. As before, pastors will need to adapt these exercises to the demands of the situation, and the capacities and personalities of the victim. In particular, pastors will need to be sensitive to the grief and anger victims may feel if they had not yet thought through the implications of their bullies' behavior, for example, the degree to which this behavior has relegated them to the outer sphere of their workplace's social scene. Victims will often feel ashamed of the people they have become at work, and wonder what is wrong with them that the pack would turn on them. Pastors need to bear in mind at these moments Jesus' crucifixion, and be ready to

reassure victims, that their Lord and Savior also experienced abuse at the hands of a pack and for no fault of his own.

Furthermore, pastors need to be prepared to teach some victims of workplace bullying the basics of emotional processing. Victims may have been raised to believe that good people do not get angry, with the result that when they, as good people, get angry, they may genuinely be in the dark about what to call this rush of adrenaline and spiking blood pressure they are experiencing. Other people may not be aware of the degree to which certain emotions tend to reside in certain parts of the body. When pastors ask them “where do you feel that physically?” they may not know how to respond. Still other people have over time grown less and less confident of their ability to read a situation emotionally. There are only so many times people can hear themselves described as “hypersensitive” or “humorless” before they will begin to wonder if, perhaps, there is something to this criticism. Pastors may want to make available to victims a list of the emotions or refer them to Michaelleen Doucleff’s blog on NPR’s website, “Mapping Emotions on the Body: Love Makes Us Warm All Over.”¹⁶ Resources like these can help people put a name to what they are feeling and where they are feeling it.

Finally, it is not everyday that people attempt to recast the major players in their lives as animals. Pastors may want to keep handy some small figurines of animals for

¹⁶ Michaelleen Doucleff, “Mapping Emotions on the Body: Love Makes Us Warm All Over,” in *your health* (www.npr.org/blogs/health, December, 30 2013).

victims to borrow for the first exercise. This can help jog victims' memories and increase the specificity of their analyses.

3.6.1 Exercise: zoology

Make a list of animals and the traits you associate with them, being as specific as possible.

Pick one of the animals from the list and journal on the following question: how are my difficult boss or colleague(s) like this animal, and how are they different? Pick a second and third animal from your list and journal on the same question.

Pick another one of the animals and journal on this question: how am I like this animal in relation to my difficult boss or colleague(s), and how am I different? Pick a second and third animal from the list and journal on the same question.

Now consider this question: If your office or workplace were a zoo, what other animals would be on display? Make a list of coworkers, and compare and contrast their personalities and behavior with another series of animals.

Take a moment to ponder the things that occurred to you during this exercise. What aspects of your and other people's behavior or personalities were highlighted in the process of comparing these people (and yourself) to animals? (Probably the way their behavior is akin to animals, which highlights some important things and excludes others.) What kinds of power relationships, hierarchies or groupings did this exercise reveal about your workplace?

3.6.2 Exercise: body scan

Set an alarm on a watch, phone or calendar program to go off discretely every two hours when you are at work. As soon as you are able after hearing the alarm, perform an abbreviated body scan, focusing on the following areas: your jaw, shoulders, chest, hands, feet, stomach and eyelids (or any other areas of your body that typically register stress). Ask yourself the following questions:

Are my upper and lower teeth in contact?
Are my lower teeth in front or behind my upper teeth?
Are my shoulders raised or lowered?
Are my shoulders curled forward or straight?
Are my fingers curled or straight?
Are my toes curled or straight?
Is my stomach settled or active? Is there any pain or cramping in my abdomen?
Are my eyelids still or do I feel (or can I remember feeling) them twitching?

If it is possible to write yourself a brief note about what you noticed during this body scan, do so. If not, try to make a mental note of any trends you might be noticing, e.g., upper and lower teeth in hard contact, shoulders raised, toes curled in shoes.

If it is possible, and safe to do so, pick out one or two focus areas to scan during your commute to and from work, as well.

Find time when you are home from work to review your notes, both written and mental, and journal on the following questions: What is my body like at work, or at times associated with work (like my commute)? What is it doing when I am not paying attention to it? Is it gravitating towards certain positions? Is it in pain in any way? Is it tense or relaxed? What might my body be trying to tell me about my experience at work?

3.7 Conclusion

Psalm 22's striking metaphors and hyperbolic language can inspire victims of workplace bullying to consider whether they are being targeted by a group whose pack mentality may have created the impression that its harmful, bullying behavior is normal. Psalm 22's enemies encounter the psalmist en masse and without ambivalence. And yet, since they do this encircling and surrounding like dogs and lions, it becomes clear that there is nothing normal or humane about their behavior. Furthermore, Psalm 22 depicts what it can feel like physically to be targeted by a group. This is another way this psalm helps victims of workplace bullying to question whether they are being treated justly.

In the next chapter, pastors will learn about a third type of workplace bully, one who works very differently from the characters described thus far: Psalm 36's antisocial personality.

4. The antisocial bully

In this chapter, readers will be introduced to the intransigent and antisocial wicked of Psalm 36. This chapter's sample journaling and visualization exercises are "virtual meeting," "the rules of the game" and "opposite behaviors."

4.1 The bully as "*abandoned despiser of God*"

In Calvin's commentary on Psalm 36, he makes an interesting point: not all wicked people are the same. Some are what he calls "abandoned despisers of God."¹ Other people may be (and usually are) "offended at their disgraceful conduct."² But these wicked do not care. "As far as in them lies, they abolish all distinction between good and evil."³ Where some people might fall accidentally into sin "because occasion presents itself all on a sudden," Calvin explains, nothing external compels these people's bad behavior.⁴ They are not succumbing to peer pressure. They have nothing particularly tempting to gain by misbehaving. They simply, and "of their own accord, devise mischief."⁵ Put differently, as S. Edward Tesh and Walter D. Zorn do,

Perhaps nothing is more indicative of the character of a person than what he thinks about when upon his bed at night. In his daily walk, a godly person may fall into temptation—Satan is always seeking to ensnare him. But [Psalm 36's]

¹ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 2:2-3.

² *Ibid.*, 2:5.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:6.

⁵ *Ibid.*

wicked would make Satan his bedfellow! He plans deliberately to pursue the way of evil, plotting how he can best seduce, defraud, or destroy.⁶

Psalm 10 portrays the wicked hiding in ambush, lurking, seeking out less populated places from which to entrap their prey in nets. Puffed up with pride, their faces seem to be saying, "God will not seek it out" (Ps. 10:4). And yet, while Psalm 10's wicked may be thinking, "we shall not be moved," they act quite differently, namely, with caution (Ps. 10:6). They are perhaps not quite so sure of getting away with their persecution of the helpless.

⁸They sit in ambush in the villages;
in hiding places they murder the innocent. (Ps. 10:8)

Psalm 22's evildoers are members of a pack. They do what the people around them are doing. Left to their own devices, removed from the bullying context, they might not encircle their victims like "many bulls." Psalm 36's wicked are different: bolder, more independent and self-assured.

¹Transgression speaks to the wicked
deep in their hearts;
there is no fear of God
before their eyes.

²For they flatter themselves in their own eyes
that their iniquity cannot be found out and hated.

³The words of their mouths are mischief and deceit;
they have ceased to act wisely and do good.

⁴They plot mischief while on their beds;
they are set on a way that is not good;

⁶ S. Edward Tesh and Walter D. Zorn, *Psalms*, Logos ed., The College Press Niv Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1999), under "Evil Unbounded" (36:1-4).

they do not reject evil. (Ps. 36:1-4)

In Psalm 36, the wicked appear to have no misgivings or ambivalence about their behavior. “They have ceased to act wisely and to do good....They are set on a way that is not good.” Although they may “plot mischief” in bed and employ “deceit,” this does not mean that they are hiding their behavior. It is just more comfortable there, propped up on the pillows. It is as if there is no such thing as authority, law, boss or HR department in this brand of wicked’s world. Instead, disembodied and all-powerful “transgression speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts.” “Why go to the trouble to conceal one’s actions?” mutters Psalm 36’s wicked. Psalm 36’s bullies need no committee’s camouflage or pack’s support to fuel their aggression. They are fine acting alone.

4.2 Rage, malice and savagery

In the 1997 movie “In the Company of Men,” written and directed by Neil LaBute, we watch as two businessmen, temporarily assigned to a satellite office, decide to seduce and then dump a vulnerable woman as a means of exacting revenge on womankind as a whole. The woman they choose is deaf, and the action takes place, as the action often does in LaBute’s movies, in a world set apart, in which there are no clear authority figures or structures of accountability. No bosses. No HR departments. No ombudsmen. Just the generic, undifferentiated and disconnected environments of airports and half-set-up offices full of youngish white men, all of whom look alike, and

none of whom appear empowered to contest the main character, Chad's, venomous disregard for other people's feelings.

When the movie came out, Janet Maslin of *The New York Times* described its "unnerving" quality, and for the most part focused her review on the "rage," "malice" and "savage[ry]" underlying Chad's character.⁷ What strikes me most about Chad's character is his self-assurance. Chad is not a complicated man, torn by misgivings and recovering from childhood trauma. He joyfully takes advantage of his autonomy, doing whatever strikes him as interesting on this extended business trip. And herein lies the challenge for his victims. His insouciance disguises his wickedness. When people are this careless of their behavior, this lacking in what might be described as normal scruples, it can be hard for victims to trust their sense of something's being wrong.

4.3 God versus the bully

James A. Waltner describes Psalm 36 as "reflective."⁸ Only in the last three verses does the psalmist request anything of God. For the most part, the psalmist ponders two contrasting themes: what Calvin describes as "the very great depravity of men," and the steadfast and expansive love of God.⁹ Psalm 36's wicked see only as far as "their own

⁷ Janet Maslin, "In the Company of Men (1997): One Modern Misogynist Extracting His Revenge," *The New York Times*, March 28, 1997.

⁸ James H. Waltner, *Psalms*, Logos ed., Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA; Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006), under "Preview" (Psalm 36).

⁹ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 2:8.

eyes.” They are ignorant of other points of view. The Lord’s love, on the other hand, “extends to the heavens,” God’s “faithfulness to the clouds” (Ps. 36:5).

⁶Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your judgments are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O Lord. (Ps. 36:6)

Psalm 36’s wicked look to “tread on” people and “drive” them “away,” depriving them, as if they were Cain, of community and belonging (Ps. 36:11). God’s love, on the other hand, gathers “all people” in the shadow of his wings to feast and protect them.

⁷How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
⁸They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights. (Ps. 36:7-8)

Psalm 36’s wicked are both deceivers and deceived. “They flatter themselves in their own eyes that their iniquity cannot be found out and hated.” Psalm 36’s God, on the other hand, is the “light” whereby God’s people “see light” (Ps. 36:9).

This series of contrasts is key to helping victims of the antisocial bully process what is happening to them. Antisocial bullies like Chad are not going to admit that they are doing something wrong. These bullies have highly evolved defense mechanisms, many of which are seemingly designed to contest victims’ belief in behavioral norms. If their victims want to get a handle on just how bad these wicked bullies’ behavior is, they will need to be able to compare this behavior to some standard not up for negotiation.

Psalm 36 suggests that this standard should be God's deep righteousness, concern for all creatures, and inclusive and life-giving love and light.

4.4 They have ceased to act wisely and do good

Psychologists explain the rigid quality of some people's interpersonal behavior in different ways. In psychoanalyst Nancy McWilliams' discussion of the psychopath or antisocial personality, for example, she notes recent research into the relationship between "early neglect, abuse, and maltreatment" and "the development of the orbitofrontal cortex, which seems to be the moral center of the brain."¹⁰ According to McWilliams, childhoods "rife with insecurity and chaos," featuring "confusing amalgams of harsh discipline, overindulgence, and neglect," can actually impact the expression of genes associated with the development of "violent and antisocial patterns" in certain genetically vulnerable individuals.¹¹ In other words, antisocial behavior may become hardwired into some people through "the interaction of experience and genes."¹² McWilliams reflects on the plight of the adoptive parents of children whose early years were spent in environments that did not allow for them to develop healthy patterns of attachment. It can be very difficult for these parents to make up for this lost

¹⁰ Nancy McWilliams, *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis: Understanding Personality Structure in the Clinical Process (Second Edition)*, Kindle ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2011), 158.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 162 and 158.

¹² *Ibid.*, 158.

ground. At times, they find themselves parenting children who, through no fault of their own, possess little capacity to respond to love with love.¹³

Psalm 36's language of ceasing and being set is its way of conceptualizing the rigidity of some people's interpersonal styles (Ps. 36:3-4). In this text, the psalmist portrays the wicked as at some point in time having stopped acting wisely and doing good. It is not that the wicked are going through a stage or that they are under a lot of pressure at home, but will soon be back to their old selves. It is that they are not going to do the right thing again, at least in any predictable way. They have crossed a boundary. And they are not looking back. The final image of Psalm 36 is that of the wicked, lying "thrust down" and "prostrate."

¹⁰O continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your salvation to the upright of heart!

¹¹Do not let the foot of the arrogant tread on me,
or the hand of the wicked drive me away.

¹²There the evildoers lie prostrate;
they are thrust down, unable to rise. (Ps. 36:10-12)

In many respects, this is who the wicked are in this psalm. Psalm 36's wicked are not going to change; they have fallen and are "unable to rise." And victims of workplace bullying who have to do with this kind of bully will need to understand that this is the case. Whether because they are the product of a profoundly neglectful and abusive childhood, or have simply decided to cease caring about what constitutes good or evil,

¹³ Ibid., 163.

some bullies will neither be able nor willing on their own and apart from careful clinical intervention to modify their behavior enough to meet their victims' needs. In addition to recognizing that these bullies are in fact doing something wrong, whether or not the bullies are able to see it, victims will also need to realize that these workplace bullies will, in the absence of professional help (and in the case of the psychopath, likely even with this help), continue doing these wicked things. Psalm 36's final image does not portray what will happen to the bully at some point when his or her chickens come home to roost. It describes where the evildoers are right now. "There the evildoers lie prostrate." There is no different future for the wicked in this psalm, or for some victims of workplace bullying, for that matter, so long as these victims are unwilling to acknowledge the reality Psalm 36 is attempting to name. As much as God is "steadfast" in God's love "to those who know" God, so too will some bullies persevere in their desire to "tread on" their victims.

4.5 It becomes us to elevate our thoughts

To return to the psalm's twin themes of God's love and the wicked's plots, Calvin, in his commentary on Psalm 36, also has this to say:

After having spoken of the very great depravity of men, the prophet, afraid lest he should become infected by it, or be carried away by the example of the wicked, as by a flood, quits the subject, and recovers himself by reflecting on a different theme. [For] it usually happens, that in condemning the wicked, the contagion of their malice insinuates itself into our minds when we are not conscious of it; and there is scarcely one in a hundred who, after having complained of the malice of others, keeps himself in true godliness, pure and unpolluted. The meaning therefore is, Although we may see among men a sad

and frightful confusion, which, like a great gulf, would swallow up the minds of the godly, David, nevertheless, maintains that the world is full of the goodness and righteousness of God, and that he governs heaven and earth on the strictest principles of equity. And certainly, whenever the corruption of the world affects our minds, and fills us with amazement, we must take care not to limit our views to the wickedness of men who overturn and confound all things; but in the midst of this strange confusion, it becomes us to elevate our thoughts in admiration and wonder, to the contemplation of the secret providence of God.¹⁴

It is appropriate that this chapter marks a transition in the thesis from diagnosis to response. Psalm 36, like Psalms 10 and 22, has insightful things to say about the wicked, their behavioral tendencies and their character traits – much of which translates to the modern workplace. In these poems, victims find their bullies’ attitudes towards right and wrong and gain insight into their strategies. But Psalm 36 does not stop there. It also has a suggestion to make about how victims might begin to live differently with the situation in which they find themselves. Calvin is right. It is extremely hard not to be colonized by another person’s hostility. The more victims of workplace bullying see it, the more victims complain (justly) about it, the more angry and reactive victims can become. Indeed, “there is scarcely one in a hundred who, after having complained of the malice of others, keeps himself in true godliness, pure and unpolluted.” Soon enough the wicked is not the only person whose vision has become narrow. Their victim’s has as well. This is why victims of workplace bullying, like the psalmist, must learn how “not to limit [their] views to the wickedness of men who overturn and confound all things,”

¹⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 2:8.

but instead to “elevate [their] thoughts in admiration and wonder, to the contemplation of the secret providence of God.” How victims might go about this elevating and contemplating will be the instructional goals of the next two chapters.

4.6 Review concepts

In preparing victims for this chapter’s exercises, pastors will want to review with them the following points, drawn from the analysis of Psalm 36:

- Not all bullies attempt to hide their behavior or seek affirmation for their hostility in a likeminded pack. Some have very little regard for other people’s opinions and do not care if other people find their behavior objectionable.
- Not everyone is open to renegotiating their behavior or attitudes. Some people are set in their hostility and do not desire to change.
- One of the problems with hostility is that it is infectious. Victims of workplace bullying will need to learn how to insulate themselves from becoming their enemies.

4.7 Sample journaling and visualization exercises for Psalm 36

Psalm 36’s sample exercises are designed to help victims check for signs of antisocial behavior in their workplaces. They raise questions about victims’ behavior on the off chance that they are starting to participate in their organization’s uncaring and selfish ethos. These exercises also seek to help victims recognize when they are dealing with a bully with a track record of intransigence, and who may be highly resistant to their attempts to modify his or her behavior.

Pastors working with victims coming from these sorts of environments may need to remind victims of what counts as ethical behavior for Christians. One possibility would be to have them read Paul’s description of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22.

After all, it is not always easy to remember what right and wrong should look like in contexts where people gleefully disregard these norms.

Finally, pastors may need to spend time helping victims come to grips with the idea that people possess varying capacities for change. Victims may be making the mistake of projecting onto their bullies their (the victims') willingness to discuss and collaboratively to determine ways of sharing space, for example, or acknowledging co-workers' expertise, where this willingness does not exist. Workplace bullies may be especially prone to rigidly habitual bad behavior, and thus less willing or able than other people to change.

4.7.1 Exercise: virtual meeting

Draw a large rectangle on a piece of paper. Imagine that this rectangle represents a conference room table. You are at a meeting with coworkers and your difficult colleague or boss. Try to imagine what this scene and its dynamics would be like as specifically as possible, by responding to the following questions:

- Where do people sit around the table? Who faces whom? Who sits at the head? In the middle? To the right or left side of the person at the head?
- Who talks? Who listens? Who interrupts? Who lectures? Who pays attention? Who does not pay attention?
- Imagine a point of disagreement cropping up: Who responds emotionally? Who employs logic? What authorities do people bring to bear on the issue? Personal experience? Statistics? Who speaks? Who does not speak?

- What do you notice about people's body language? Who is leaning in? Who is pushed away from the table with their legs or arms crossed? Who is sitting still? Who is fidgeting?
- What have people brought with them to this meeting and what objects do they interact with during the meeting? Notebooks? Cellphones?

Take a moment to review your notes: what do you notice about people's behavior and language in this group situation? What do you notice about your own behavior and language? Do you see any signs of antisocial behavior in your coworkers (or yourself)? How about evidence of empathy?

4.7.2 Exercise: the rules of the game

Find a copy of Exodus 20:1-19 and read it through carefully. Commandment by commandment, revise this text to align it more adequately with your work environment. What ten laws does your workgroup appear to follow, not in an ideal world, but right now and according to the observations you made in Exercise A?

Note: This exercise is designed to push you to consider not only your organization's "do's and don'ts," but its fundamental value system. So don't rush through the first three commandments. Take this opportunity to ponder who "God" is in your workplace.

After you have come up with your list, spend some time journaling on the changes you made to Exodus 20:1-19, and what these changes may indicate about your difficult colleague/boss, your workplace's ethos and yourself as a member of this team. Do people honor their "mothers and fathers" in the profession at your company? Or do

they routinely treat older colleagues with scorn? Do they take care to speak truthfully about one another's contributions? Or do they routinely lie about or misrepresent other people's ideas or work product? Every institution has its unwritten rules. What are your company's? And who is writing them?

4.7.3 Exercise: opposite behaviors

List all of the behaviors that have concerned you about your bully or bullies, being sure to go back as far in time as you are able. Then attempt to find, for every item on this list, an example of behavior that would constitute each item's opposite. For example, you might list a considerate action like thanking someone as the opposite of a person's giving you a blank stare when you drop off completed work.

Write these "opposite behaviors" down in another list. Then make a third list, this time of all the instances when you have seen your bully employing these "opposite behaviors."

Do the math: What is the ratio of negative to positive behavior?

Mine the context: Do these positive behaviors tend to occur in certain situations, for example, when a supervisor is present?

Take notes on what you have observed: Is your bully's behavior consistent enough to be considered rigid and uncompromising? Do you see evidence of manipulation when the bully "makes nice" with colleagues or bosses? What might these observations have to tell you about your bully's potential for change?

4.8 Conclusion

The intransigent and antisocial “wicked” in Psalm 36 alert victims of workplace bullying to several important issues. First, they help them to see why it might be difficult to feel confident about their misgivings about this type of bully’s behavior. The antisocial bully can be very self-assured, and good at devaluing other people’s interpretations of his or her behavior. This is why victims often need to access texts like Psalm 36 to remind themselves of what constitutes moral behavior and also that moral behavior is not as up for grabs as their bully may believe. Psalm 36 also makes an important point about the potential rigidity of some bullies’ behavior. Psalm 36 warns victims of workplace bullying to be careful not to expect too much from some bullies, like the capacity or desire to learn different and more ethical ways of relating to their colleagues.

Finally, this chapter forms a bridge between Phase One’s analysis of the workplace bully’s character and behavioral traits and Phase Two’s analysis of victim response. In contrasting the attitudes and behaviors of the wicked to those of God, Psalm 36 inspires victims of workplace bullying to begin turning their attention away from the bully and back towards God. In the next chapter, through a close reading of Psalm 37, I will suggest additional ways for victims to re-center themselves in the Lord.

5. The angry victim

In this chapter, readers will look at what Psalm 37 recommends that victims of workplace bullying do to counteract the negative emotions their experience may be inspiring in them. Readers will then review a series of visualization and journaling exercises based on these recommendations, and explore the value of biblical strategies like stillness for victims of workplace bullying. This chapter's focus issue is victims' rage and frustration. Its concluding sample exercises are "*memento mori*, takes one, two and three."

5.1 The sufferings of the just

Hans-Joachim Kraus notes that in the history of Psalm 37's interpretation there have at times been commentators who have made the psalm out to be atavistic. They have claimed that, in its call to wait patiently for God to wither the wicked like grass, Psalm 37 "transmits 'faith in retribution'" and represents an "inferior morality."¹ Kraus disputes this claim, as do Mays and Waltner.² For these commentators, Psalm 37 seeks to address a legitimate and anguished theological concern. "Is Yahweh a living God? Can he show his power in the midst of this world?"³ Or are people to understand that the only things that count in life are money and power? Psalm 37's voice is not vindictive,

¹ Kraus, under "Purpose and Thrust" (Psalm 37).

² Ibid. See also Mays, under "The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth" (Psalm 37); Waltner, under "Fret Not Because of the Wicked, But Trust in the Lord" (Psalm 37).

³ Kraus, under "Purpose and Thrust" (Psalm 37).

according to Kraus, Mays and Waltner. It is *realistic* about how frustrating it can be for the just to see the wicked prosper. “How directly,” Luther writes, “the prophet grasps and strikes the thoughts of the heart in this temptation [to fret over the wicked’s success]!”⁴ Psalm 37’s voice is that of the sage, the person who has lived a full life and can testify to what he or she has seen God do for those who trust in God and the inexorability of time. “Do not fret because of the wicked,” says the psalmist; “do not be envious of wrongdoers,”

²for they will soon fade like the grass,
and wither like the green herb.
³Trust in the Lord, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
⁴Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
⁵Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
⁶He will make your vindication shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.
⁷Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,
over those who carry out evil devices.
⁸Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.
Do not fret—it leads only to evil.
⁹For the wicked shall be cut off,
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. (Ps. 37:1-9)

The psalmist's message is not about retribution or revenge. It is about patience and stillness: trusting God, refraining from anger, letting time run its course,

⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 14: Selected Psalms Iii*, Logos ed. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 211.

recognizing that certain behaviors contain within them the seeds of their own negative consequences.

5.2 A different strategy

We live in a culture that exalts activity. People's workdays are no longer limited to the hours between nine and five. Smart phones have made it possible for the office to follow people home. It is "business as usual" nowadays to see people answering texts and emails at the gym or their children's baseball games. Our culture promotes suspicion and reaction. According to the blogosphere, big food is poisoning us with additives; we need to buy local and avoid, at all costs, the drive-in at McDonalds. Google is recording our keystrokes; we need to switch to Bing. Cable news has been co-opted by one or the other political party; we can't believe anything we are told. Everywhere we look, it is resist, resist, resist.

And yet, this constant state of both activity and reactivity is not the only way to live, and may be a dangerous tack for people struggling with abusive relationships at work. These relationships are marked by bullies' drive to "carry out evil devices," "plot," "gnash their teeth," "draw the sword," "bend the bow," "borrow, and...not pay back," "watch" and "seek to kill" (Ps. 37:7, 37:12, 37:14, 37:21 and 37:32). The urge to respond in kind can be very strong, but will not generally disentangle victims from the dynamic. Overt resistance can cause bullies to focus more of their energies on victims, or even worse, make it difficult for bystanders to distinguish between victim and

perpetrator on the grounds of behavior. Victims of workplace bullying need to give themselves permission to respond to their bullies in a manner different from the manner in which their bullies relate to them. They need to see “be[ing] still,” “wait[ing] patiently,” “not fret[ting]” and “trust[ing] in the Lord” as legitimate strategies for navigating their way through hostility, not cop outs. Victims of workplace bullying report that their attempts to fight back may initially have felt like the right thing to do, but that they quickly became exhausting and counterproductive. Indeed, “in a workplace setting, a subordinate ‘fighter’ is also akin to ‘problem employee’ or ‘troublemaker.’”⁵

I worked for several years off and on with a victim of workplace bullying whose reactivity was as much a problem for her as her bullies’ hostility. She could not let the slightest email poke pass without replying immediately and at great length. It was clear that she felt the weight of the world on her back, when it came to this relationship. It was her responsibility to ensure that they knew how hard she was trying to change. It was up to her to correct every possible misinterpretation of her actions or intentions. When she would speak to me about the situation, it was clear that there was more at stake for her than a job. She was fighting for justice. What they were doing to her was not right. It was a very troubling situation — not because she was wrong to think her

⁵ V.R. Walden, “Relational Experiences and Emotions at Work,” in *Emotion in Organizations*, ed. S. Fineman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 79; as cited by Tracy et al., “Nightmares, Demons, and Slaves: Exploring the Painful Metaphors of Workplace Bullying,” 179.

bullies' treatment of her unjust, but because she could not get out of God's way long enough for God to take action. Workplace bullies choose their victims wisely. In this case, they chose someone whose anxiety and reactivity ended up giving her bullies all the fodder they needed to ramp up their engagement with her. Would a strategic stillness in the face of her bullies' demands have enabled her to keep her job? Perhaps not. But it would have made it a lot harder for them to characterize her as argumentative and a poor team player.

The first thing Psalm 37 has to say to the bullied is — stop. Do not do what seems to come naturally. "Let grace, not nature, rule here. Curb you anger, and calm yourself for a little while."⁶ Its next piece of advice has to do with its understanding of the internal logic of bullying behavior. According to Psalm 37, the wicked have begun a process that will eventually lead to their downfall:

¹⁴The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows
to bring down the poor and needy,
to kill those who walk uprightly;
¹⁵their sword shall enter their own heart,
and their bows shall be broken. (Ps. 37:14-15)

Victims should not just be patient and still to avoid inciting their bullies. They should, in Luther's words, "wait, so that by [their] raging, discontent, and vexation [they] do not hinder God in this undertaking."⁷

⁶ Luther, 211.

⁷ Ibid., 213.

You see the wicked man succeed so well in all his evil devices that a proverb has been coined about it: "The greater the scoundrel, the greater his success." But be wise, dear child, and do not let that get you down. Cling to God, and your heart's desire will come—in abundance! But it is not yet time; the scoundrel's success must pass by and have its appointed time before it is all over. Meanwhile you must commit it to God, take your pleasure in Him, and find satisfaction in His will, so that you do not hinder His will in you or in your enemy. For that is what happens when people will not stop raging; either they ram their cause through headfirst, or they smash it to bits.⁸

According to Luther, God's will is more than something being worked out in the victim through the bully. It is something being worked out in the bully through the bully. The bully's behavior has its "appointed time" for both success and failure because the bully has his or her own lessons to learn. Victims' attempts to rush this timeline can end up hindering God and victims' own progress out of or away from the bully's hostility. Luther uses the image of a battering ram in this passage. A ram can succeed in bursting through some barriers, but not without damage to itself. Other times, the ram will fail and in so doing, "smash it[self] to bits."

When victims of workplace bullying strain to bring about a just resolution to their issues at work before colleagues or supervisors are ready to hear about the situation or the bully has had a chance to make enough other enemies, victims can become like these battered, as opposed to battering, rams. Researchers note the impact of bullying on retention rates in work groups as a whole. Interestingly, a culture of bullying does not just drive victims' from jobs. Bystanders also leave, so long as it is

⁸ Ibid., 213-214.

clear to them that something unjust is happening.⁹ When victims of workplace bullying take the high road, and refuse to react to their bullies' provocations, bystanders, by and large, will come to see the difference between victims' and bullies' behavior – and act in support of victims. On the other hand, if victims attempt to fight fire with fire, and to ram their cause through when "it is not yet time," it can be difficult for bystanders to discern who is the bully and who the victim. Hence the wisdom of Luther's (and Psalm 37's) advice to "let grace, not nature, rule here. Curb you anger, and calm yourself for a little while." Patience is not just a virtue in this situation. It is good strategy.

5.3 Now, *but also then*

Psalm 37's second lesson involves teaching victims (and their pastors) how to reframe their experiences in time. Trauma has a tendency to anchor people's thoughts and feelings to the painful present. Victims of workplace bullying are frequently preoccupied with the events of today or this week. They will obsessively rehearse in their heads the most recent conversation they had with their bullies, replaying the scene over and over. At home in the evening, they will perseverate about their workday to friends and family without receiving any relief or closure. It is as if their minds cannot reach back to the time before the bullying began – or forward to a different and better future.

⁹ Parzefall and Salin, "Perceptions of and Reactions to Workplace Bullying: A Social Exchange Perspective," 768.

A key emphasis in Psalm 37 is the fact that there is not just this “now” of the bully upon which to meditate, but a “then” — and this “then” does not belong to the bully. “Yet a little while,” says the psalmist, “and the wicked will be no more; though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.”

³Trust in the Lord, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
⁴Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
⁵Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
⁶He will make your vindication shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday. (Ps. 37:3-6)

¹⁶Better is a little that the righteous person has
than the abundance of many wicked.
¹⁷For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,
but the Lord upholds the righteous. (Ps. 37:16-17)

Psalm 37 employs a multitude of future constructions (approximately twenty five in the NRSV's translation) to break victims' preoccupation with the present moment. The psalm speaks eloquently about all the things God will do for victims and the life they will "inherit" (Ps. 37:34). According to Psalm 37, God will give victims “the desires of [their] hearts” and make their “vindication shine like a light,” upholding them, keeping them safe forever, and exalting them. The victim's story is about more than what is happening to him or her now in Psalm 37. There is a now in this psalm: and it is not an easy one. The wicked are watching for the righteous and seeking to kill them. But

there is also a then characterized by “security,” living “in the land,” and “abundant prosperity.”

5.4 The bully as smoke

Psalm 37 reminds victims of the fragile nature of human life. In the face of the wicked’s arrogant plots, “the Lord laughs” (Ps. 37:13). Why? Because God knows that their day is coming, and not just because their actions contain within them the seeds of their own destruction. The wicked, like everyone else, are human. Psalm 37’s opening call to stop fretting “because of the wicked” is not an attempt to shame victims out of their anger. The second clause in verse two – “for they [the wicked] will soon fade like grass” – is key. Clearly, the psalmist does not have a problem with frustration and indignation *in se*. Recall Psalm 10’s opening verses:

¹Why, O Lord, do you stand far off?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Ps. 10:1)

Psalm 37’s point is that victims’ fear and anger are ultimately unnecessary. What reason, asks the psalmist, could there be for envying someone not long for this world, who “will soon fade like the grass” and “wither like the green herb”? There is nothing so great or scary about a bully. Like everyone else, bullies resemble the “glory of the pastures; they vanish — like smoke they vanish away.”

¹⁰Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;
though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.
¹¹But the meek shall inherit the land,
and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.
¹²The wicked plot against the righteous,

and gnash their teeth at them;
¹³but the Lord laughs at the wicked,
for he sees that their day is coming. (Ps. 37:10-13)

¹⁸The Lord knows the days of the blameless,
and their heritage will abide forever;
¹⁹they are not put to shame in evil times,
in the days of famine they have abundance.
²⁰But the wicked perish,
and the enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures;
they vanish—like smoke they vanish away. (Ps. 37:18-20)

Many passages in the Old Testament speak of the human desire for a long life. It is taken for granted that this is a good thing: something to be prayed for, and a mark, not only of an individual's good health, but of a just society. According to the Old Testament, just nations have old people who get to do things like enjoy the fruit of their labors.

¹⁸But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.
¹⁹I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.
²⁰No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
²¹They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
²²They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,

and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. (Is. 65:18-22)

In the new, just Jerusalem no infants will live but a few days and no people will be deprived of long enjoying “the work of their hands.” Unjust nations, on the other hand, will find that even their young struggle to stay alive (Is. 9:17). Psalm 37 links length of days and justice in another sense. According to this psalm, justice happens not only when the good grow old amidst their own vineyards. Part of what makes the world just is that the wicked grow old – and then die. (And then their children pass from sight, too.) No one's life lacks an expiration date. But especially the wicked in Psalm 37 fight a losing battle against impermanence. In this psalm, the meek inherit the land; the wicked vanish like smoke.

5.5 A still more excellent way

Being bullied can inspire in people profound anger and helplessness.¹⁰ Isolated from the social support their job once provided them, victims can find themselves struggling to understand what justice might look like in their situation, fearful about their finances, and alienated from the business or institution with which they thought they had a tacit contract: “I work hard for you; you treat me like a human being.” At times, victims can even become preoccupied with the desire for revenge.¹¹ In the documentary, “Murder by Proxy: How America Went Postal,” a former USPS employee

¹⁰ Tracy et al., “Nightmares, Demons, and Slaves: Exploring the Painful Metaphors of Workplace Bullying,” 162-163 and 172.

¹¹ Ibid., 173.

describes how she “had it all thought out, all thought out” – a Molotov cocktail thrown into an office with the exit door blocked off and “it would all be gone...all their records and paperwork on us.”¹² Workplace bullying is a serious issue. The rage and anger it can inspire are not to be taken lightly. They can ruin people’s health and lead to violence.

Pastors need to ask victims of workplace bullying what they have done to seek redress, how successful these attempts have been, or if, in victims’ opinion, it would even be wise to bring their situation to a supervisor’s attention. And pastors need to listen carefully to victims’ responses. This is no time for pastors to project onto victims the pastor’s own desire for power and control. The Bible does not have the same preoccupation with “the warrior” as our culture does. Its praise of the “mighty man” is muted. Though we do find David’s “Three,” for instance, doing such things as fighting solo in lentil patches, catalogs of warriors are rare in the Bible (2 Sam. 23:11). Rather, the focus of its stories tends to be on the meek. Some of the Bible’s most important characters are associated with flight. They run away when things get bad, or engineer the escape of others. The Bible does not expect everyone to pursue justice heroically with sword drawn. It is one thing if a person is a king or judge, another thing entirely if they are the humble. For those in the latter group, the Bible often recommends that they not take the law into their own hands: that they see judgment as God’s responsibility. Their

¹² Emil Chiaberi, “Murder by Proxy: How America Went Postal,” (Key Element, 2010).

task? To “depart from evil, and do good.” Their strategy? To “wait for the Lord, and keep to his way” (Ps. 37:34).

There is “a still more excellent way” to deal with the crisis of workplace bullying than our culture’s worship of violent reaction (1 Cor. 12:31). Just because their bullies are hostile and vindictive, does not mean that victims must be also. The biblical call to counter hostility with stillness enables victims of workplace bullying to carve out a space in their lives for an experience different from that of their bully. It can also break the entangling cycle of bullying – wherein one person’s hostility necessitates another person’s hostile response, which then fuels the instigator’s sense that he or she was right to act the way they did. Psalm 37’s images of withering grass and vanishing puffs of smoke remind victims of the radically contingent nature of their bullies’ plots. Ultimate power does not have to fear such things as chemotherapy and arthritis. Workplace bullies only appear to be in control. God and time are the real forces to be reckoned with, according to Psalm 37, for both victim and bully. Finally, Psalm 37 reminds victims that bullying behavior contains within it a series of unavoidable consequences for the bully. Bullying behavior cannot hide forever. Bystanders will eventually see what is happening. Like the centurion and crowds at Jesus’ crucifixion in Luke’s gospel, they will know who is being crucified and who is doing the crucifying (Lk. 23:47-48). Victims of workplace bullying do not need to rush these consequences; they will happen in due time, all on their own.

5.6 Review concepts

In preparing victims for this chapter's exercises, pastors will want to review with them the following points, drawn from the analysis of Psalm 37:

- A lot of times people think they need to do something right now, this second about their unjust relationships. They forget to give God time to act.
- People frequently think it is their responsibility to punish other people's bullying behavior. They forget that this behavior creates its own ill consequences for its doers.
- People often see the unjust winning in the short term, and get frustrated. They forget that no one escapes death, and that the power of the unjust is ultimately as fragile and impermanent as a blade of grass.

5.7 Sample journaling and visualization exercises for Psalm 37

In the exercises that follow, victims will be encouraged to step away from their anger through time. Psalm 37's sample exercises are *memento mori*, remembrances of death. They are designed to help victims of workplace bullying acknowledge the impermanence of life — for both their bullies and themselves. These exercises may at first seem morbid to victims, but are a classic spiritual discipline for a reason. Nothing changes people's perspective on a painful present like the realization that all things do in fact pass. Here, however, pastors may need to emphasize to victims the importance of *practicing* this discipline. Anger is a strong emotion; it is not easily dissipated.

5.7.1 Exercise: *memento mori*, take one

Picture your place of work and the people who work there. Now cast your mind forward five years from now, and imagine people moving about at their jobs. What things are on their minds? What things have happened to them in the last five years?

Have there been deaths in people's families or illnesses?

Have people's children moved away?

What physical changes do you see in your colleagues?

Who has retired, and how do those in retirement now spend their days?

Cast your mind forward ten years, and try to imagine what things might have changed about your work site. Look for the signs of wear and tear on the buildings and grounds. Look also for things that have been added or changed.

Cast your mind forward twenty years. Imagine your coworkers' lives. Where are people? What are they doing? Do they have families? Are they alone? Imagine what your older colleagues may look like or how their lives are going. Who is still at home? Who has moved into assisted living? Imagine a day in the life of one of your older coworkers who, twenty years from now, is suffering from Alzheimer's or dementia.

Watch them sitting in the common room of the nursing home during a meal or alone in their room. What do you see in their eyes or face? What are they doing with their hands? What are they thinking or feeling? What can they remember? What have they forgotten?

Cast your mind forward one hundred years. Try to imagine some of the changes that have taken place in the world. What countries have grown powerful? What countries have lost standing? Imagine a child of that time walking through a museum

dedicated to the technology and inventions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

What do they see in the displays, and what do they think about these things?

Imagine the place of your gravesite, or where your ashes may have been spread.

What traces remain of you? What traces remain of the person you found so challenging?

What odds and ends do your descendants know of you? What bits and pieces do the descendants of your bully know about them?

Imagine the lives of these descendants, what they may look like, what they may be thinking, what things make them happy and what things sad.

Sit for a moment or two with this idea of the passage of time and the images you associate with it. Then take a few moments to journal about the things you saw happening in people's lives and what you found to be the most compelling symbols of life's impermanence.

5.7.2 Exercise: *memento mori*, take two

One by one, review your most compelling symbols of impermanence from Exercise A. Try to see them as a series of snapshots or single takes from a movie.

A coworker, now elderly and retired, sitting alone at home.

A gravestone, its edges and lettering worn.

A person you knew when he or she was young, standing with a cane, his or her hands thin and wrinkled, his or her hair white and thinning.

A once-familiar city neighborhood, either grown affluent or abandoned and shuttered.

Notice what thoughts, feelings and sensations accompany these symbols.

Take a moment to journal about this experience and what it feels like to live in time this way, aware of both the present moment and also the passage of time.

5.7.3 Exercise: *memento mori*, take three

Imagine a series of powerful rulers from history: Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Queen Elizabeth I, or Stalin.

Imagine what their lives looked like at the height of their empires and conquests. What did they eat? Drink? Wear? How did people treat them? What did their bedrooms look like? How were the spaces from which they ruled laid out and decorated?

Then imagine their deaths. Where and how did these happen? What did they think or feel during their final illnesses? How much of this experience was their wealth and power able to shield them from? What could their wealth and power not touch?

Take a moment to journal about death: What aspects of death are common to us all? And what do we come to see more clearly about our own lives and the lives of those with whom we struggle when we “remember” the lives and deaths of figures like Alexander or Elizabeth?

5.7 Conclusion

Psalm 37's images of withering grass and vanishing smoke (its emphasis on the passage of time) present victims of workplace bullying with a different perspective on their experiences. Victims often feel overwhelmed and trapped in an unhappy present, due to their preoccupation with their bullies' seeming power and success. Psalm 37 reminds victims that their bullies are not all-controlling gods, but fragile human beings. Their days are numbered, as are their victims'. Psalm 37 also reminds victims that bullying behavior brings about its own consequences. Victims can take the higher road, confident that hostile behavior "will out." Psalm 91, the topic of the next chapter, further shifts victims of workplace bullying's attention away from their bullies by teaching victims to seek out God as their Refuge, no matter how much their bullies may act as if they possess power over victims' safety and security.

6. The dependent victim

In this chapter, readers will consider what Psalm 91's characterization of God as Refuge may have to teach victims about how to respond to bullying. The focus issue for this chapter is victims' self-destructive sense of dependency on their bullies. Chapter Six's sample journaling and visualization exercises are "safety nets," "opposite God" and "boundary work."

6.1 Psalm 91's reception history

Commentators point out that Psalm 91 has had a tricky reception history. People have not always known what to do with this psalm. Just how powerful are its words, really? Worn as an amulet, can the psalm save people from bullets and steel?¹ This is the psalm the devil quotes in his desert-debate with Jesus. Apparently, even Jesus had to spend time figuring out what Psalm 91 was getting at, in making such radical claims about God's desire to preserve the faithful from every possible danger. Should Jesus worry about throwing himself from the pinnacle of the temple, or not?

Calvin has this to say about Psalm 91:

In this psalm we are taught that God watches over the safety of his people, and never fails them in the hour of danger. They are exhorted to advance through all perils, secure in the confidence of his protection. The truth inculcated is one of great use, for though many talk much of God's providence, and profess to believe that he exercises a special guardianship over his own children, few are found actually willing to intrust their safety to him.²

¹ Mays, under "My Refuge and My Fortress" (Psalm 91); Waltner, under "Questions Raised."

² Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 3:477.

The problem with this psalm's reception, according to Calvin, is not that people are using it to test God. It is that people are not using it at all. They are not allowing the psalm to transport them to another place: "the shelter of the Most High" (Ps. 91:1). Although they "talk much" of faith, they are not "actually willing to intrust their safety" to God. "Many" are familiar with the language of Providence, says Calvin. They "profess to believe" that God "exercises a special guardianship over his own children." But these words and images are just that to people: words and images. When people are in danger, from a bullying colleague, for example, their real theology gets put into play. Victims of workplace bullying forget that God is their Refuge and instead draw close to their bullies, either to mollify or to outfox them. Psalm 91 reminds victims that the only true source of shelter is God, and that it is a waste of time to seek protection from creatures (namely, their bullies) who are themselves always at risk of falling or pestilence.

¹You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
²will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."
³For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
⁴he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
⁵You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,
⁶or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

⁷A thousand may fall at your side,
 ten thousand at your right hand,
 but it will not come near you.
⁸You will only look with your eyes
 and see the punishment of the wicked.
⁹Because you have made the Lord your refuge,
 the Most High your dwelling place,
¹⁰no evil shall befall you,
 no scourge come near your tent.
¹¹For he will command his angels concerning you
 to guard you in all your ways.
¹²On their hands they will bear you up,
 so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.
¹³You will tread on the lion and the adder,
 the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot. (Ps. 91:1-13)

In this psalm, God is the Preserver, period. The Most High, the Almighty, the Lord (and not someone or something else) will deliver the victim of workplace bullying from terror, arrows, pestilence and wasting destruction. To God belongs the patch of shade or "shadow" on a hot summer day, the "fortress," covering "pinions," "shield" and "buckler." In other parts of the Bible, God may assert God's self through pillars of fire, burning bushes or prophets. In this psalm, God and God alone will be the victim's refuge and shelter. The victim of workplace bullying will not gaze upon God from a distance. Living, abiding and dwelling in God, he or she will be able to say directly to the Lord, "My God, in whom I trust." God will command God's angels "concerning" the victim, to "guard" the victim "in all [his or her] ways." Therefore, victims' feet will not only "tread on the lion and the adder," but also know no harm of any kind, not even a bruise from a stone. Psalm 91 departs radically from the idea that God works in

mysterious ways. There is neither mystery, nor any strange, difficult-to-identify “men” in this psalm, as in other biblical texts featuring angels (Gen. 18:2). There are the victim of workplace bullying and God, the one who intends to “satisfy” the victim “with long life” (Ps. 91:16).

6.2 The geography of workplace bullying

Victims of workplace bullying may feel as if there are only two places in the universe: the place where they encounter the bully and the place where they think about the bully (in other words, everywhere else). Victims’ worlds can seem very small: there is the office, and then the car or bus, the home, the kitchen, and the kids’ recital where victims ponder their next move. Psalm 91 guides victims to a third location, capable of dramatically changing the landscape of their lives. This place, God’s refuge, is located high above these other two places. It is a nest perched up in a tree. It is a fortress looking down over a plain. It is a shelter where victims can kneel under wings, or hunker down behind a shield. It is a place of separateness. Bad things do not come near victims here. The things that happen to others do not happen to them. They can see them, but they do not have to experience them.

⁷A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

⁸You will only look with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked. (Ps. 91:7-8)

In Chapter Five, I argue that learning how to reframe the relationship in time can help victims overcome the intense rage their bullies may inspire in them. Here I suggest that victims might benefit from learning how to expand their sense of place, as well. There is something very spiritually rich about experiencing God as not only here with the victim of workplace bullying as he or she slogs through email, but there, dwelling in a temple or some other sacred space separate from the victim's daily life. This fortress God gives victims a place to go, a different orientation from which to live their everyday lives.

In the Book of Daniel, the narrator describes how every day, and despite the law against doing so, Daniel "continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open toward Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him" (Dan. 6:10). This faithfulness to a distant God, a God other than King Darius, may at first have been how Daniel's bullying colleagues, the "presidents and satraps," got to him (Dan. 6:6). They cannot fault him for corruption, so they trick Darius into agreeing to throw Daniel to the lions for praying to his foreign God (rather than Darius). But then the text makes it clear: Daniel's faith is not a disadvantage. It is what saves him from the lions/presidents:

Then, at break of day, the king got up and hurried to the den of lions. When he came near the den where Daniel was, he cried out anxiously to Daniel, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you faithfully serve been able to deliver you from the lions?" Daniel then said to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths so that they would not

hurt me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong.” (Daniel 6:19–22)

Elsewhere the same dynamic is in play. Daniel does something differently from other people because of his faith. For example, he eats differently, only to fare better than “all the young men who had been eating the royal rations” (Dan. 1:15). In this book, Daniel, like Joseph and Esther, finds a place for himself in a foreign court through his wisdom: specifically, his “insight into all visions and dreams.” But unlike these two other characters, he appears to do so through his commitment to pursuing a relationship with a foreign God who requires him to maintain his own forms of foreignness. Both the king and Daniel speak of this God as Daniel’s God, and recognize (strangely enough) that it is Daniel’s faithful service to this God (as opposed to Darius) that delivers or gives life to Daniel. His foreigner’s faith-based diet makes him “fatter” than the other young men (Dan. 1:15). His prayer life, that sends him away from the court and orients him towards a foreign capital, shuts the lions’ mouths. In this book, a relationship with a distant God not only protects a foreigner from an empire’s power, but is what enables that foreigner to thrive in the midst of empire.

Likewise, victims of workplace bullying might want to consider the degree to which their faith could be a little more foreign. Victims of workplace bullying sometimes act as if they live under the power of an empire. They want to go home everyday and leave their work in the office, but that day’s crop of insults and intimidation tactics follows them out to the car. They want to stop feeling tense all the time, but it is hard not

to get nervous all over again every morning as they sit in their kitchen drinking coffee, thinking about the trials ahead. Victims of workplace bullying have often been taught to think of God as “with them,” lovingly present in all their struggles. What they may not have considered is that God is also above and beyond petty office politics. Victims of workplace bullying can lack perspective. Unlike Daniel, they do not take themselves three times a day to an upper room with windows opening out towards Jerusalem. They stay at work. Psalm 91 prods them into considering whether this is what faith ought to look like. It re-centers their lives, away from the office, by inspiring them imaginatively to take refuge in God Most High.

6.3 A God who answers

In Psalm 91, the psalmist portrays the targets of hostility as destined to live fearlessly under God’s protection because these targets have sought God out. They have made God their refuge. Their love for God, their knowledge of God’s name, their decision to call on God, will bring them to this safe place.

¹⁴Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.
¹⁵When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.
¹⁶With long life I will satisfy them,
and show them my salvation. (Ps. 91:14-16)

Karl Barth notes the similarities between these verses and Jesus' statement in Matthew Chapter 7:³

"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." (Mt. 7:7–8)

According to Barth, there is a role for us in our relationship with God. We ask, we seek, we knock. We love, we know, we call. God, in turn, delivers, protects, answers, rescues and opens the door. What makes God God for us is not the fact, as some suppose, that God, by God's power, compels us to obey God. According to Barth, a God who would force us to obey is not a God whom we as humans could ever truly love. We might fear this God, but we would not recognize this God as having any legitimate "claim" on us. "Even in the depths of hell," we would harbor in our hearts disdain for this God.⁴ God claims us as God, according to Barth, because we "may" worship God.⁵ We "may." We are not compelled to do so.

God has given us Himself. He is not only mighty over us. He is not only the essentially good. He is not only our complete satisfaction. He has given Himself to us. He has graciously turned to us. He has made Himself ours. With His divine goodness He has taken our place and taken up our cause. He is for us in all His deity. Although He could be without us—He did not and does not will to be without us. Although He has every right to be against us—He did not and does not will to be against us. This is the God in whom we may believe. He is

³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*, Logos ed., vol. III.4 (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 87.

⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God*, Logos ed., vol. II.2 (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 552.

⁵ Ibid.

this God even if we do not yet or no longer believe in Him. It is as this God that we know Him when we may believe, when the opportunity presents itself, when we make use of it.⁶

Note how different this God is from the victim's bully. The bully takes every opportunity to inculcate in his or her victim feelings of dependency and insecurity. If the bully does not like the victim, the victim stands to lose something valuable. If the victim does not please the bully, the victim will pay because of the bully's greater seniority, more important position or "hard-earned reputation for success." It is a relationship based on a series of one-sided demands that can never be met. Psalm 91's God gives when the victim asks. Psalm 91's God delivers when the victim loves. God is "not only mighty" over victims of workplace bullying (like their boss). God is "not only the essentially good" (this is how the bully conceives of him- or herself). God "has given Himself" to the bully's victims. In this God, victims of workplace bullying discover a Being worthy of worship – because this God, unlike their bully, is for them.

Al-Karim Samnani argues that victims may bring to the workplace certain culturally derived assumptions about power that render victims more vulnerable to being targeted. One of these cultural characteristics he calls "power distance."⁷ This term refers to the degree to which people from a particular culture will "accept power

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Samnani, "The Early Stages of Workplace Bullying and How It Becomes Prolonged: The Role of Culture in Predicting Target Responses," 121.

imbalances as legitimate within institutions and organizations.”⁸ According to Samnani, employees coming from cultures with low power distances do not tend to assume that people in possession of power have the right to bully or intimidate them, while employees coming from cultures with high power differences may have the opposite expectation. For this reason, Samnani proposes that workplaces interested in reducing bullying behavior consider offering specialized training to employees from “at risk” cultural backgrounds in order to help these employees recognize “questionable behaviors.”⁹ According to Samnani, without this training, employees from high power distance cultures may appear to bullies to be safe targets, victims who will not recognize their right to contest bullying behavior.

In many respects, I would argue that Psalms 10, 22 and 36 constitute a biblical version of this kind of training, as all three psalms feature behaviors victims should watch out for. Psalm 91, on the other hand, works on recalibrating victims’ sense of power distance. If God, according to Psalm 91, the ultimate source of power, answers when victims call, a bully’s refusal to do so starts to look a lot less like power, and a lot more like insensitivity.

⁸ Ibid., 121-122.

⁹ Ibid., 129.

6.4 *The victim who depends*

Victims of workplace bullying are not incompetent employees. If they were, they would not represent such a fascinating challenge for bullies. Victims of workplace bullying are dependent. They need something: a paycheck, the approval of their peers, affirmation. And they see their bullies as holding the keys to the kingdom. It is only through their bully's approval that victims will be able to get the promotion, keep the job, pay the mortgage, live a fulfilling professional life. So victims cringe before, placate, rail at, and desire revenge against their bullies, spending more and more of their life entangled in this destructive relationship. Where before victims of workplace bullying may have felt a certain healthy distance between themselves and other people, a sense of their own integrity and privacy, now the boundaries between other people and them feel porous. The bully has entered into their space, and they, in turn, increasingly find themselves living in their bully's world.

Victims will gather excessive amounts of evidence to refute their bully's charges. They will consult with friends and family repeatedly about next steps or strategy. They will have difficulty sleeping, revolving conversations round and round in their heads, looking for ways to get the better of the bully the next time, or searching for clues as to what they may have done this time to provoke their bully. And then there are the hours spent regretting a public loss of temper or episode of tears. Why, they will ask themselves, why does this person always seem to get the better of me?

It may sound bizarre and even perhaps foolhardy to encourage victims of workplace bullying to “entrust their safety” to God, but this is good strategy. Bullies can sense dependency in other people. They know who has something to lose. The only way to lose the bully? To lose this thing that victims mistake for their life by taking refuge over and over again in God. Bullies can also tell who will be willing to commit to a relationship with them: the people with nowhere else to go. The bully wants someone to attack. They will always be right there, ready to be hurt or angry. The only way to escape the bully? To have somewhere else far away to go, where it does not matter what the bully says, thinks or does, a high place, a sheltered and shielded place: God. Finally, bullies gravitate towards people with low expectations for the powerful. If people think that authority figures have the right to be cruel and domineering – that this is what being in charge looks like – they will do very little to disincentivize bullying behavior. They will “take it.” How can one break free from this self-destructive worldview? The only way is to covenant actively with a God who answers when victims call.

6.5 Review concepts

In preparing victims for this chapter’s exercises, pastors will want to review with them the following points, drawn from the analysis of Psalm 91:

- While we often find ourselves panicky and looking for refuge in all the wrong places when we struggle with difficult relationships, actively naming God as our Refuge can help us to be more discriminating about whom or what we trust and how we go about responding to hostility.

- Picturing our Refuge God as dwelling in some remote, beautiful, high, and wind-swept place expands our sense of the world and enables us to gain perspective on our lives and distance in our relationships.
- In our tradition, we consider God to be powerful because of the way God makes room for our freedom. This is true power for us — not a capacity to frighten or exclude people or to treat them disrespectfully.

6.6 Sample journaling and visualization exercises for Psalm 91

Psalm 91's sample exercises are designed to help victims retool their image of God, identify the relationship between their concept of God and the way they respond to bullies, and practice setting more intentional interpersonal boundaries. In discussing these exercises with victims, pastors may want to bear in mind Deuteronomy's point about theological choices being life choices. Victims may not be accustomed to the idea that people "choose" the God they follow, and that it is possible to choose badly. It may also be important for pastors to help victims feel the difference between worshipping a god like Baal, Lord of the Storm, versus Israel's God, who abides in a sanctuary. Pastors might encourage victims to spend time in a church by themselves, taking in the quiet ambiance. A good text for them to read while doing so might be the story of Elijah on the mountain, finding God not in earthquake, fire or thunder, but in a still, small voice (1 Kings 19:11-13).

Some victims may also need their pastors to teach them how to approach relationships in a more guarded manner. Victims of workplace bullying may draw their interpersonal boundaries too loosely. They may assume that everyone is their friend and that all they need to do to bring a bully around is be transparent with him or her. When

the bully ends up using victims' words against them, it comes as a shock to these victims. Victims can attract the attention of bullies because they wear their emotions too openly on their faces. They do not know how to cultivate emotional privacy. Sometimes victims of workplace bullying were raised to believe that nothing is more important or healthy than self-expression. Pastors may need to explain to these victims that transparency is an ideal, not a strategy for every relationship.

Finally, pastors need to consider what feelings and anxieties may lie at the root of some victims' desire constantly to seek to be reconciled with recalcitrant bullies and at great cost to the victims' own wellbeing and self-esteem. Often these victims harbor a profound loneliness of soul. Their only refuge in life has been other people's approval and understanding. It may come as a relief for victims of workplace bullying to realize that God is their constant companion, but it may also be difficult for victims to live from this place. This is where pastors will need to be ready to speak to their charges about the concrete steps people can take to grow their faith. Daily spiritual practices like Bible study and prayer are ordinary means of grace for victims of workplace bullying, as these practices help victims realize that change involves both decision and process.

6.6.1 Exercise: safety nets

Make a list of the people, places and things that you associate with safety. Then create a mantra from the list, using the following formula:

_____ (an item from the list) is like God.
_____ (another item from the list) is like God.

_____ (a third item from the list) is like God, etc.

Repeat this mantra five times slowly. Then meditate on it, item by item, first focusing on what it is about an item that reminds you of safety, then focusing on the idea that God is this thing.

Notice what thoughts, feelings and sensations this exercise brings to the surface.

6.6.2 Exercise: opposite God

Make a list of qualities you think are the opposite of traditional theological ideas about God, what theologians call God's "attributes" (i.e., God as omniscient, omnipotent, just, good, loving, etc.).

Ask yourself: If God were this Opposite God, what would I need to do about the colleague who is making me uncomfortable?

Take a moment to journal about these "action items."

Then ask yourself: Am I doing any of these things now? And if so, what might this be telling me about my image of God? (Take a moment to journal in response to this question.)

Repeat the exercise, this time working from a list of the traditional God-concepts and images. This second time around, be sure to ask yourself a question similar to the one you ended with the first time: Am I doing any of these things now? And if not, what might this be telling me about my image of God? Again, take some time to journal on these questions.

6.6.3 Exercise: boundary work

The next time you find yourself standing in line at the grocery store, amidst a group of people on an elevator, or sitting at a table in a food court at a mall, notice the space between your body and the bodies of the people around you.

What are the exact boundaries of your body? And what does the space between those boundaries and the next closest person contain? What can you see in that space?

What does it feel like to move subtly away? Or to lean subtly towards another person?

The next time you are having a conversation with someone, listen for the pauses between their words and yours, their comments and your replies. What does that pause sound like? How long does it last? Does it have to be short? Or can you stretch it out?

The next time you are in a meeting, class, or training session, watch what the people around you are doing and what you do in response. Note the energy in the room – is it positive? Negative? Imagine that you are able to set your energy level by raising or lowering the volume level on your mobile phone. What does it feel like to set your energy level at a slightly different “volume” from that of the group? Is it freeing? Or scary?

Find time to journal about these exercises. What did they teach you about how you typically relate to people? Do you experience yourself as possessing a sense of privacy when you are around others? Or do you experience yourself as being, so to

speak, “lost in the crowd”? What might it feel like to try employing these exercises when you find yourself in tricky situations at work, or in your personal life?

6.7 Conclusion

Psalm 91’s images of God as Refuge encourage victims of workplace bullying to examine their own theological tendencies to see whether these tendencies may be part of the reason they struggle with bullying at work. Victims may not always realize the degree to which their expectations of power, for example, may be perpetuating their bullies’ hostility. Psalm 91 reminds victims to look to God for safety, to create space in their lives for something other than what is happening at work, and to set the bar higher for those with power.

7. The pastor as counselor

It can be intimidating for pastors to think of themselves as “counselors.” State boards tightly regulate the various titles associated with mental health and addictions professionals. In Indiana, to be a marriage and family therapist requires one thousand hours of post-degree clinical experience. To be a mental health counselor requires three thousand hours. At the school where I minister, both the licensed clinical social worker and the licensed professional counselor report to a marriage and family therapist with a PhD in psychology to ensure the appropriateness of their treatment plans. It is hard not to wonder sometimes, with all this reporting and vetting, whether pastors have the requisite training or oversight to counsel people.

There is also a sense in which pastors may worry about the ethics of their attempting to counsel people on the off chance that their counselees may be suffering from mood, thought or anxiety disorders. People understand now, in a way they perhaps did not in the past, that mental health issues have a physiological basis, and deserve to be treated like any other illness: with medical interventions. Most mainstream pastors would not suggest that a diabetic congregant attempt to pray the condition away. They would support this person’s taking insulin. Likewise, pastors are getting the message: people suffering from thought disorders like schizophrenia should take mood stabilizers. People struggling with addictions to opioids should look into whether or not medications like naltrexone could help them in their battle for sobriety. Even an illness

like depression, whose symptoms can be subtle and easily misinterpreted, has come out of the closet in many churches, to be recognized as the serious and life-threatening condition it can be. In this new, and I would argue more compassionate and realistic, climate, pastors often feel torn. They want to do the right thing by their people. They do not want to assume expertise they do not have. So they refer people to doctors or mental health professionals – just in case – rather than both referring them and maintaining an ongoing counseling relationship with them.

The irony of this reticence on our parts as pastors is that clinical psychology has increasingly over the last few decades turned to practices familiar to us in the church, like journaling, visualization and meditation, to treat a variety of different mental health issues. I recently came upon the following statement in a training manual for therapists interested in learning how to teach mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) for recurrent depression:

We therefore recommend as a minimum that prospective instructors have a daily formal mindfulness practice in their own lives for at least a year before they embark on teaching it to clients.¹

According to the authors of this manual, a year's worth of formal practice in mindfulness is adequate to the task of teaching others this skill. The vast majority of pastors have far more than a year of prayer and meditation under their belts. They have been setting aside time to be alone with their thoughts and emotions for years. After all,

¹ Segal et al., under "Your Own Practice."

this seeking after solitude and stillness, this trust that whatever one's feelings, thoughts or actions may be, they are not the sum of who a person is, lies at the core, not just of a program like MBCT, but prayer and confession. In confessing our sins to God, we lay aside "every weight and the sin that clings so closely," reminding ourselves that the race is what we are about, not this or that passing thought.

Pastors need to be ready to refer people to doctors if they are unwell for any reason, including mental health. They also need to respect the amount of time therapists have put into their training, and the degree to which they have opened themselves up to being evaluated by peers and supervisors. Pastors have a lot to learn from clinical psychologists. Among other things, clinical psychologists do a much better job checking to see if the methods they employ with different patient populations actually work. They want to know how their different cognitive and behavioral therapies stack up against the gold standards in psychopharmacology like selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). Pastoral caregivers should be asking similarly specific questions about the value of their ministries, as opposed to resting content with survey results that imply that church attendance correlates positively with various health outcomes.

At the same time, pastors also need to recognize that they have been in the past, and ought to be currently, an important resource for people's emotional and mental health. It was English Quakers early in the nineteenth century who spearheaded major reforms in the treatment of the mentally ill, creating communities for them to live and

work in, as opposed to attempting to drown the disease out of them.² Furthermore, the Bible's prophetic edge, so much a part of the Jewish and Christian traditions, still provides our culture with what could be described as its most compelling narrative of the social, as opposed to biological, origins of human suffering. People do not experience life as tragic in Genesis because of an overactive limbic system. They feel the sting of rejection at the hands of the people to whom they should be the closest, or they suffer because the people in power over them have decided to exercise this power in cruel and exploitative ways.

I would argue that pastors have a responsibility to get the word out to their congregations that they are ready to sit down with their people to talk about what it means to live with other human beings. The source of people's sadness and depression is often a hopeless, entangling and cruel relationship, about which people do not know what to think or do. Pastors should consider preaching at least one sermon a year about the reality of hostility in human society. They could take as their text any of the lectionary readings that portray Jesus' struggle with his various opponents or his rejection in his hometown of Nazareth. This would be a good way of letting people know that they are aware of issues like workplace bullying and ready to help.

² Robert Whitaker, *Mad in America: Bad Science, Bad Medicine, and the Enduring Mistreatment of the Mentally Ill*, Kindle ed. (Basic Books, 2009), 15-17 and 22-24.

Pastors should also offer programming designed to teach people about the various spiritual disciplines that have been associated with Christianity through the centuries, with an eye to explaining how these practices can impact people's mental, emotional and physical health. Church leaders sometimes shy away from taking this approach, which is understandable. They do not want to turn something like prayer into a wellness initiative. Yet, at the same time, it is important to realize that practices like meditation, study, confession, pilgrimage and Sabbath-keeping, among others, can foster healthier ways of understanding and responding to negative moods, thoughts and feelings. Pastors might want to offer people the opportunity to learn about the psychological benefits of practices like vigils or fasting, and then begin to include opportunities for people to try out these practices as part of the congregation's regular worship life.

The process I chart in the preceding pages focuses on two goals: (1) helping victims of workplace bullying recognize when they are being bullied and (2) helping victims begin to disentangle themselves from the bullying dynamic. The thesis introduces victims to some of the ways workplace bullies may conceal their intentions. It explores how victims might gain a different perspective on colleagues' behavior in workplaces in which aggression has become normalized. It also takes up the issue of how victims might learn to sidestep cultural scripts that insist upon the necessity of their mirroring, and thus often, amplifying bullying behavior. Through scriptural study and

carefully designed journaling and visualization exercises, the thesis seeks to help victims of workplace bullying start down the road to recovery from an experience that is sadly far too common.

To some readers, the process I describe may at first feel unfamiliar. But I would remind these readers that scriptural study, visualization and journaling are just ways of naming what preachers do every week to prepare for Sunday morning. Every week preachers explore the nuances of a text, and attempt to use its images, concepts and characters to help their people see their own lives more clearly. They try to imagine the challenges their people may be facing and how this text might represent an answer or an insight for them. They take notes. They make lists. They plunge back into their memories for concrete examples of this or that dynamic. They search their hearts and minds for that “ah ha” moment. When a preacher experiences that moment of insight, he or she knows that the scriptures have reminded him or her of something important and healing – the very thing his or her congregation will also need to hear.

Why preachers are too frequently the only ones in the congregation routinely grappling with the Bible in this manner is a question for another thesis. For now, it is important only to help pastors realize that they have what it takes to counsel victims of workplace bullying. They know how to hold the scriptures up alongside their people’s lives, both past and present, searching for wisdom, meaning and guidance. Rather than thinking of themselves as counselors, if this word is a stumbling block for them, pastors

can think of themselves as people well-versed in a particular set of spiritual disciplines, looking to teach others how to renew their hearts and minds through study, imagination and writing, so that they too might “discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect” in the midst of a trial like workplace bullying (Rom. 12:2).

7.1 The contemporary workplace

If a pastor has spent the bulk of his or her professional life working in a small congregational setting, a pastor may be leery of proposing that a congregant suffering from workplace bullying come to the pastor for counseling. After all, what does he or she know about how a large company or even a family-owned business might operate? Or what is behaviorally normative from profession to profession? The language of the modern workplace can be confusing to outsiders. Although it may not be as acronym-prone as the military, corporate America has its pet phrases: “hedgehog concept,” “direct report,” ROI (“return on investment”), to name just a few.³

Instead of being intimidated into silence, however, I would urge pastors to mine the resources of their congregations. Most congregations include people from a wide range of work experiences: everything from waiting tables, to cleaning teeth, to serving as an executive assistant, to litigating cases, to working the night shift in a Alzheimer’s

³ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And Others Don’t*, Kindle ed. (Harper Business, 2001), under “The Hedgehog Concept.”

ward. Pastors interested in learning more about the contemporary work environment might do the following:

- Ask congregants from a variety of work environments to take them on a tour of their office or workplace to get a sense for such things as the proximity in which people work and how a workplace's layout communicates power differentials or job function.
- Ask congregants with a more sophisticated understanding of the work-world to walk them through their company's organizational chart in order to gain a clearer understanding of how various companies structure their organizational hierarchies.
- See if there are any people in the congregation with human resources or labor law backgrounds and ask them to tutor you on the basics: what constitutes workplace harassment, sexual or otherwise, the impetus behind "Right-to-Work laws, basic worker's rights, and so on.
- Encourage congregants to email them articles they have found interesting or informative about contemporary business practices.

Pastors should also discern whether there are members in their congregations who are experienced managers capable of serving as mentors for congregants attempting to learn how to negotiate difficult work environments. The counseling approach I propose focuses on two related issues: first, helping people discern if they are being bullied, then helping victims learn how to disentangle themselves from the bullying dynamic. Experienced managers might be able to provide additional practical guidance as to how to broach certain conversations or how to exit more skillfully from certain situations. They could also be an important source of information about what organizations typically can and cannot do to help victims of workplace bullying seek

redress and/or how victims might best transition out of an organization with a track record of not managing workplace conflict effectively.

Finally, pastors may want to consider the degree to which many congregants might benefit from more opportunities to discuss their work life, career goals and career challenges in the context of the congregation. The average American worker spends a great deal of time on the job – in many cases, drawing energy and inspiration from the opportunity to serve others and to excel in their chosen field. But there can also be burn out and bullying, economic deprivation and the experience of being bound by what are sometimes called the “golden handcuffs” of a well-paying job that nevertheless leaves one feeling empty at the end of the day. It can be difficult for people, the further they get away from college and their early- to mid-twenties, to cultivate that cohort of fellow travelers with whom to check in about the ambivalence or frustration they may be feeling at work. Pastors should consider offering people of all ages and professions the chance to meet in small groups to discuss the relationship between their faith and their work, to pray for one another as they enter into times of vocational discernment, to grow in awareness of the diverse challenges people may be facing as workers, and to consider together what resources the congregation might possess to help its workers.

The experience of being bullied at work can be intensely alienating, as it frequently involves attempts to exclude targets from important social groupings, to make them look bad in front of others, to ignore them pointedly or, conversely, to single

them out for unfair treatment. A congregation actively engaged in discussions about work, with a pastor ready to help people process the experience of being targeted at work, can do a lot to help heal these feelings of being different and alone. In Ecclesiastes 5:18, the Teacher says,

This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of life God gives us; for this is our lot.

A person's work life is a precious thing. Like eating and drinking, it is both a necessary part of life and something that should be experienced as so much more than just a necessity. A congregation committed to honoring this scriptural vision of work, especially in the lives of those for whom work has become anything but joyful, will be a congregation committed to honoring God's gracious provision for God's people in all aspects of their lives.

Bibliography

- Andersson, Lynne M. and Christine M. Pearson. "Tit for Tat? The Spiraling Effect of Incivility in the Workplace." *The Academy of Management Review* 24, no. 3 (1999): 452-471.
- Aquino, Karl. "Structural and Individual Determinants of Workplace Victimization: The Effects of Hierarchical Status and Conflict Management Style." *Journal of Management* 26, no. 2 (2000): 171-193.
- Aquino, Karl and Scott Douglas. "Identity Threat and Antisocial Behavior in Organizations: The Moderating Effects of Individual Differences, Aggressive Modeling, and Hierarchical Status." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 90, no. 1 (2003): 195-208.
- Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*. Vol. III.4. Logos ed. London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004.
- Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God*. Vol. II.2. Logos ed. London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004.
- Baumeister, Roy F., Laura Smart and Joseph M. Boden. "Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression: The Dark Side of High Self-Esteem." *Psychological Review* 103, no. 1 (1996): 5-33.
- Bennett, Rebecca J. and Sandra L. Robinson. "Development of a Measure of Workplace Deviance." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 85, no. 3 (2000): 349-360.
- Brotsky, Carroll M. *The Harassed Worker*. New York: Lexington Books, 1976.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge. Logos ed. Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845.
- Calvin, John. *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Translated by James Anderson. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010.
- Chiaberi, Emil. "Murder by Proxy: How America Went Postal." Key Element, 2010.
- Collins, Jim. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And Others Don't*. Kindle ed.: Harper Business, 2001.

- Cortina, Lilia M., Vicki J. Magley, Jill Hunter Williams and Regina Day Langhout. "Incivility in the Workplace: Incidence and Impact." *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 6, no. 1 (2001): 64-80.
- Dobson, Sarah. "Workplace Bullying." *Administrative Assistant's Update*, (2011): 3, 7.
- Douclev, Michael. "Mapping Emotions on the Body: Love Makes Us Warm All Over." In *your health*: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/health>, December, 30 2013.
- Houshmand, Marjan, Jane O'Reilly, Sandra Robinson and Angela Wolff. "Escaping Bullying: The Simultaneous Impact of Individual and Unit-Level Bullying on Turnover Intentions." *Human Relations* 65, no. 7 (2012): 901-918.
- Hutchinson, Marie, Margaret Vickers, Debra Jackson and Lesley Wilkes. "Workplace Bullying in Nursing: Towards a More Critical Organisational Perspective." *Nursing Inquiry* 13, no. 2 (2006): 118-126.
- Keashley, Lorelei and Karen Jagatic. "By Any Other Name: American Perspectives on Workplace Bullying." In *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice*, edited by Dieter Zapf, 31-60. London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2003.
- Keashly, Lorelei. "Emotional Abuse in the Workplace." *Journal of Emotional Abuse* 1, no. 1 (1997): 85-117.
- Keashly, Lorelei. "Interpersonal and Systemic Aspects of Emotional Abuse at Work: The Target's Perspective." *Violence and Victims* 16, no. 3 (2001): 233-270.
- Kim, Eugene and Theresa M. Glomb. "Get Smarty Pants: Cognitive Ability, Personality, and Victimization." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 95, no. 5 (2010): 889-901.
- Kraus, Hans-Joachim. *A Continental Commentary: Psalms 1-59*. Logos ed. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works, Vol. 14: Selected Psalms III*. Logos ed. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999.
- Maslin, Janet. "In the Company of Men (1997): One Modern Misogynist Extracting His Revenge." *The New York Times*, March 28, 1997.

- Mays, James Luther. *Psalms*. Logos ed. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.
- McWilliams, Nancy. *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis: Understanding Personality Structure in the Clinical Process (Second Edition)*. Kindle ed. New York: The Guilford Press, 2011.
- Namie, Gary. "The Challenge of Workplace Bullying." *Employment Relations Today* 34, no. 2 (2007): 43-53.
- Neuman, Joel H. and Robert A. Baron. "Workplace Violence and Workplace Aggression: Evidence Concerning Specific Forms, Potential Causes, and Preferred Targets." *Journal of Management* 24, no. 3 (1998): 391-419.
- Parzefall, Marjo-Riitta and Denise M. Salin. "Perceptions of and Reactions to Workplace Bullying: A Social Exchange Perspective." *Human Relations* 63, no. 6 (2010): 761-780.
- Robinson, Sandra L. and Anne M. O'Leary-Kelly. "Monkey See, Monkey Do: The Influence of Work Groups on the Antisocial Behavior of Employees." *The Academy of Management Journal* 41, no. 6 (1998): 658-672.
- Salin, Denise. "Ways of Explaining Workplace Bullying: A Review of Enabling, Motivating and Precipitating Structures and Processes in the Work Environment." *Human Relations* 56, no. 10 (2003): 1213-1232.
- Samnani, Al-Karim. "The Early Stages of Workplace Bullying and How It Becomes Prolonged: The Role of Culture in Predicting Target Responses." *Journal of Business Ethics* 113, no. 1 (2013): 119-132.
- Samnani, Al-Karim. "Embracing New Directions in Workplace Bullying Research: A Paradigmatic Approach." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 22, no. 1 (2013): 26-36.
- Segal, Zindel V., J. Mark G. Williams and John D. Teasdale. *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression*. Epub ed. New York: The Guilford Press, 2013.
- Sheehan, Michael. "Workplace Bullying: Responding with Some Emotional Intelligence." *International Journal of Manpower* 20, no. 1/2 (1999): 57-69.

- Tepper, Bennett J. "Consequences of Abusive Supervision." *The Academy of Management Journal* 43, no. 2 (2000): 178-190.
- Tesh, S. Edward and Walter D. Zorn. *Psalms*. Logos ed. The College Press Niv Commentary. Joplin, MO: College Press, 1999.
- Tracy, Sarah J., Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik and Jess K. Alberts. "Nightmares, Demons, and Slaves: Exploring the Painful Metaphors of Workplace Bullying." *Management Communication Quarterly : McQ* 20, no. 2 (2006): 148-185.
- Walden, V.R. "Relational Experiences and Emotions at Work." In *Emotion in Organizations*, edited by S. Fineman, 64-82. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000.
- Walker, Laura. "Beyond the Playground: When Bullying Elbows Its Way into the Workplace." *EHS Today*, no. April (2013): 32-37.
- Waltner, James H. *Psalms*. Logos ed. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottdale, PA; Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006.
- Whitaker, Robert. *Mad in America: Bad Science, Bad Medicine, and the Enduring Mistreatment of the Mentally Ill*. Kindle ed.: Basic Books, 2009.

Biography

Johanna McCune Wagner was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada on May 3, 1970. She graduated from Bryn Mawr College with a Bachelor of Arts in Latin in 1995, from Cornell University with Master of Arts in Medieval Studies in 1998, and from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity in 2007.